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A CONSERVATIVE REFORMER IN T'ANG CHINA: THE LIFE AND THOUGHT  
OF HAN YU (768-824)

*The University of Arizona*

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A CONSERVATIVE REFORMER IN T'ANG CHINA  
THE LIFE AND THOUGHT OF HAN YÜ (768-824)

by

Victor Eugene Manley

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the  
DEPARTMENT OF ORIENTAL STUDIES  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of  
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THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

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THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA  
GRADUATE COLLEGE

As members of the Final Examination Committee, we certify that we have read the dissertation prepared by Victor Eugene Manley entitled A Conservative Reformer in T'ang China: The Life and Thought of Han Yü (768-824)

and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement  
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy .

<u>Wm Schultz</u>	<u>April 18, 1986</u>
<u>Hillman T-100</u>	<u>April 18, 1986</u>
<u>Chas Carter</u>	<u>18 April 86</u>
<u> </u>	<u>Date</u>
<u> </u>	<u>Date</u>
<u> </u>	<u>Date</u>

Final approval and acceptance of this dissertation is contingent upon the candidate's submission of the final copy of the dissertation to the Graduate College.

I hereby certify that I have read this dissertation prepared under my direction and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement.

John T. Lee April 18, 1956  
Dissertation Director Date

STATEMENT BY AUTHOR

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SIGNED: \_\_\_\_\_

*Vitor M. M.*

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## ABSTRACT

Han YÜ is famous in Chinese history both for his literature and for his defense of Confucianism at a time when it was being seriously challenged by Buddhism and religious Taoism. Although his influence was limited during his own lifetime, in later times Han Yü came to symbolize the conservative Confucian values that are often identified with the traditional Chinese state.

This study examines Han Yü's life and thought in an attempt to determine to what extent his later image as an ideal Confucian was or was not justified. A chapter on the historical background provides the context for Han YÜ's biography, which is divided into five chapters. This is followed by a chapter discussing the intellectual background of Han Yü's thought. Two further chapters discuss, first, the basis of Han YÜ's conservative image, and, second, a number of his writings which illustrate the limits of his conservatism.

Han Yü's ideas are related to the political and social circumstances of his times, and it is found that while he is indeed a conservative and a Confucian, the extent of both his conservatism and his Confucian orthodoxy have been exaggerated.

## INTRODUCTION

Han Yü (A.D. 768-824) is known for his defense of traditional Confucian values at a time when those values were being challenged by the alternative value systems of Buddhism and religious Taoism (Tao-chiao, as differentiated from Taoism as a philosophical system). He was only moderately influential during his own lifetime, and he was not well known during the latter years of the T'ang dynasty (618-907) under which he lived, or during the succeeding period of the Five Dynasties (907-960). His reputation began to grow during the Sung period (960-1279), however, and he came to symbolize the conservative Confucian values that have been thought of as essential ingredients in the ideology of the traditional Chinese state.

It has long been recognized that significant changes took place in Chinese society during the period of transition from the T'ang to the Sung. Among other things, these changes included major differences in the composition of the ruling class and of its system of values. The T'ang was the last dynasty under which politics were dominated by a hereditary elite whose roots went back nearly a thousand years. This elite all but disappeared after the fall of the T'ang and was replaced for the remainder of the imperial period (i.e., up to 1911) by a new elite whose

status derived not from heredity but from success in competitive civil service examinations. The values of the new elite reflected the growing influence of a new form of Confucianism (Neo-Confucianism: tao-hsüeh or li-hsüeh) which was now restored to a place of dominance in Chinese thought after appearing to lose ground to Buddhism and Taoism for several centuries previously.

In view of the contrast between the two periods represented by the T'ang and the Sung (which is more complex than is indicated here), it is of interest that Han Yü, who was born and lived under the T'ang, was most appreciated and admired during the Sung dynasty and its successors. His reputation endured, in fact, as long as did the social and political system which assumed its basic features in the Sung.

The person most responsible for establishing Han Yü's reputation in the Sung was probably Ou-yang Hsiu (1007-1072). Ou-yang Hsiu was himself an important writer, thinker, and statesman, and his admiration for Han Yü was an important factor in creating the larger-than-life image of Han Yü that was passed on to later generations. It is probably fair to say that Ou-yang Hsiu found in Han Yü confirmation of many of his own literary and intellectual



values, and that this helps to account for the high praise he gave to Han Yü.<sup>1</sup>

One might even go so far as to suggest that the political and intellectual climate of the Sung and later Chinese dynasties provided a much more receptive atmosphere for Han Yü's ideas than did Han Yü's own time. This is not meant to suggest that Han Yü was consciously ahead of his time. Rather, the issues that concerned him tended to fade into the background during the remainder of the T'ang period, only to re-emerge more prominently in the Sung as a new and more open ruling class sought solutions to problems that the T'ang had left unsolved.

Sung statesmen and thinkers were concerned with problems such as the proper balance of power between central and local administration, civilian versus military control over defense, the basis for selection of capable officials, and what sort of values would be conducive to social harmony and economic prosperity. These were, to be sure, issues that were of concern to all Chinese governments throughout history. However, the Sung solutions, which emphasized a strong central administration, civilian control over defense, and commitment to Confucian values as a basic factor in the selection of officials, coincided

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Ou-yang Hsiu's evaluation of Han Yü at the end of his biography in the Hsin T'ang Shu (New T'ang History) (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1973), chapter 176, p. 5269. Hereafter cited in the form HTS 176, p. 5269.

closely with Han Yü's views on these subjects. This made his ideas seem particularly relevant to their problems.

Another factor that made Han Yü's views attractive was his strong support for traditional Chinese values. Unlike the T'ang, who were militarily dominant over their neighbors, the Sung state was militarily weak and had to be constantly on its guard against foreign invasion. Pride in the superiority of their culture helped to maintain Chinese self-respect despite their military weakness, and Han Yü's writings helped to justify that pride.

It was not without reason, therefore, that Han Yü was given a heroic image as a symbol of values that were associated with national strength, morality, and cultural pride. Laudable as their intentions may have been, however, those who promoted Han Yü's image as a sort of Confucian saint tended to rob him of his humanity by exaggerating his virtues to the point that it was no longer possible to admit that he suffered from the same weaknesses and insecurities as other men.

Han Yü's image as an ideal Confucian conservative who would not think an impure thought nor associate with any but upright Confucian gentlemen has led to distortions of his character by both his critics and his defenders. Purveyors of gossip and apologists for the ideologies that Han Yü attacked delighted in stories that showed him in a bad light, behaving in ways contrary to his ideal image.

Those who favored Han YÜ either discounted evidence that conflicted with his image or made excuses for inconsistencies in his behavior. It became difficult to separate Han YÜ as an individual human being from the image that had been built around him.

Even modern Chinese scholars who have studied Han YÜ have had difficulty separating the man from the image. Their interpretations have, moreover, frequently been complicated by a desire to relate Han YÜ's ideas to modern political ideologies that did not exist during his lifetime. Han T'ing-i, for example, a descendant of Han YÜ who resides in Taiwan, is naturally favorably disposed toward him, but still finds it necessary to show that Han YÜ's political views are basically consistent with those of Sun Yat-sen.<sup>2</sup>

Communist historians in mainland China who are accustomed to viewing history in terms of class struggle tend to see Han YÜ as a representative of the class of big landowners who were politically dominant during the T'ang.<sup>3</sup> Even so eminent a modern historian as Hsiao Kung-ch'uan

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<sup>2</sup> Han T'ing-i, Han Ch'ang-li ssu-hsiang yen-chiu (Studies in Han YÜ's Thought) (Taipei: Shang-wu yin-shu kuan, 1982).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Hou Wai-lu et al., Chung-kuo ssu-hsiang t'ung-shih (General History of Chinese Thought) (Peking: Jen-min ch'u-pan she, 1959), vol. 4a, pp. 319-342.

seems to take Han YÜ to task for advocating values contrary to those of modern democracy.<sup>4</sup>

While such approaches to Han Yü's life and thought do have their uses, it seems that one might legitimately wish to seek out the man behind the image, and that is the purpose of this study. We shall attempt to see Han YÜ not as a Confucian saint, but as a man living in a particular historical context. To the extent that it is possible to do so, we shall examine his thoughts and opinions in relation to the circumstances that gave rise to them. In this way we can gain a more balanced view of Han YÜ and also, perhaps, some insight into the T'ang roots of the changes which came to fruition in the Sung.

To avoid misleading the reader, some comments regarding the nature and limitations of this study may be in order. The author is by training and by inclination a historian, with a historian's bias toward a chronological approach to the presentation of data. While this study deals with ideas, it is not concerned with philosophy for its own sake, but with the relationship between ideas and historical circumstances. Han YÜ is not important as a philosopher, but that does not mean that his ideas are not historically significant.

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<sup>4</sup> Hsiao Kung-ch'uan, Chung-kuo cheng-chih ssu-hsien shih (History of Chinese Political Thought) 2 vols., (1945-1946; rpt. Taipei: Hua-kang ch'u-pan yu-hsien kung-ssu, 1977), vol. 1, pp. 406-408.

Han YU is important as a literary figure, but this aspect of his life is dealt with only briefly here. To date, four doctoral dissertations have been written on various aspects of Han YU's literature, but none on his life and thought.<sup>5</sup> It is not my purpose to duplicate what others have already done, but to supplement their work by providing additional material that is necessary for a complete understanding of Han YU and his place in history.

My purpose in using Han YU's literary works as historical source materials is similar to that of F.W. Mote in his study of the Ming poet Kao Ch'1 (1336-1374).<sup>6</sup> Han YU's literature, like Kao Ch'1's poetry, "is looked upon primarily as a source for the historian and not as art in its own right." It is hoped that through this approach it will be possible to attain in some degree the goal that

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<sup>5</sup> The original dissertations are as follows: Diana Yu-shih Chen Mei, Han YU as a Ku-wen Stylist (Yale University, 1967); Stephen Owen, The Poetry of Meng Chiao (751-814) and Han YU (768-824): A Study of a Chinese Poetic Reform (Yale University, 1972); Charles Hartman, Language and Allusion in the Poetry of Han YU: The "Autumn Sentiments" (Indiana University, 1974); Madeline Spring, A Stylistic Study of Tang Guwen: The Rhetoric of Han Yu and Liu Zongyuan (University of Washington, 1983). Two of these have been published: Stephen Owen's The Poetry of Meng Chiao and Han YU (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975) does not differ significantly from his original dissertation, but the article entitled "Han YU as a Ku-wen Stylist" by Diana Yu-shih Mei which appeared in the August, 1968 issue of the Tsing-hua Journal of Chinese Studies (n.s., vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 143-207) is an abridgement of her dissertation.

<sup>6</sup> F. W. Mote, The Poet Kao Ch'1, 1336-1374 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962).

Professor Mote set for his study of Kao Ch'i, "to see him as a man of his time, remarkable by reason of his artistic genius, but also a man whose life represents for us something of the significance of the age in which he lived. Through him we are enabled to see much of his time and his place, his society and his civilization." It is my hope that this study of Han Yü might, like Professor Mote's study of Kao Ch'i, "bring us closer to the meaning of his life, and of his times."<sup>7</sup>

Because the nature of this study is historical and not literary, I have avoided the temptation to engage in translation for its own sake. In pursuing my research I have made extensive use of primary Chinese sources. When quoting from these sources, however, I have generally not thought it necessary to re-translate those of Han Yü's writings which have already been translated by others. Two major exceptions to this rule are the important essays, "An Inquiry into the Way" and the "Memorial on the Buddha's Bone." It seemed desirable to include full translations of both pieces for the reader's reference since they have played such an essential role in the formation of Han Yü's image. All translations not otherwise attributed are my own.

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<sup>7</sup> Mote, Kao Ch'i, p. 4.

Another reason for limiting the amount of direct translation to be included is that frequently such translation would require extensive annotation and/or commentary not directly relevant to the subject under discussion. It has often seemed preferable to summarize or paraphrase Han YU's words in order to bring out more clearly the significance of what he has to say, as well as to avoid undue interruption of the biographical portions of the text.

I have tried to avoid explanatory footnotes whenever possible by incorporating explanatory material into the text. In quoting Chinese texts I have inserted in parentheses information that would have been understood by a T'ang reader but which may not be apparent to a modern Western reader. I have tried to provide sufficient background information to make the text comprehensible to a non-sinologist reader while still including references to original sources for the use of more specialized readers. In deciding how much explanatory information to provide, I have tried to include only what is necessary to understand the text. I have not attempted to identify every classical reference or to trace the source of every allusion.

Dates and biographical references are provided for major figures, but not for those who are only mentioned in passing, such as recipients of letters from Han YU who are

not otherwise important. Official titles have generally been translated in accordance with Charles O. Hucker's A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China.<sup>8</sup> I have made exceptions where it seemed that Hucker's translation might mislead the non-sinologist reader or where his terms differ from established usage by Western T'ang specialists. An example of the former is the term shih, which Hucker renders as "serviceman" meaning one who is qualified for government service. I have translated it usually as "gentleman" and occasionally as "scholar" because this shows more accurately what the term signified in the T'ang. Examples of terms in the latter category are tsai-hsiang and chieh-tu-shih, which Hucker renders as "Grand Councilor" and "Military Commissioner." I have retained the translations "chief minister" and "military governor" as used in standard English language works on the T'ang such as volume three of the Cambridge History of China.<sup>9</sup>

Ideally, a study of this kind should present the development of Han Yü's thought in a straightforward, chronological manner, integrated into an account of his life and times. This was my original intention. However, Han Yü never devised any organized philosophical system.

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<sup>8</sup> Charles O. Hucker, A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985).

<sup>9</sup> Denis Twitchett, ed., The Cambridge History of China (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), vol. 3.



Moreover, many of the texts which reveal important aspects of his thought cannot be dated accurately, thus making it difficult to fit them into a chronological framework.

Under these circumstances, there are two possible approaches to understanding Han YÜ's thought. One is to examine his ideas without specific reference to the particular circumstances that prompted them. The other is to deal first with his life, in order to observe the various external factors that may have influenced him and how he responded to them, and then, with the advantage of the perspective this allows, to deal separately with those texts which cannot be fitted into the chronological framework. While this approach is not entirely satisfactory either, I believe that it can provide a more accurate view of Han YÜ's thought than one which does not take account of the context in which his ideas were born. Knowing how Han YÜ behaved and what he said in situations where we do know what the circumstances were puts us in a better position to evaluate his ideas in situations where we do not know the circumstances that prompted them. This, in turn, puts us in a better position to evaluate the extent to which Han YÜ's image as an ideal Confucian conservative is justified.

It should be understood that while I believe that the extent of Han YÜ's conservatism has been exaggerated, this is not intended as an attack on his personal

integrity. It was not unusual in Chinese history for someone committed, like Han YÜ, to Confucian ethical values to find himself from time to time in situations where it was necessary to make some compromises regarding those values in order to survive in the real world. In judging situations of this kind, it is necessary to note carefully on what issues an individual was willing to compromise and on what occasions he refused to compromise. If Han YÜ does not quite measure up to the ideal image created for him by later generations, it remains true that he was willing to risk his life in support of his principles when he believed that it mattered.

The general format of this study is intended to present the information necessary for an understanding of Han YÜ's life and thought in the most logical and practical manner, given the nature of the source materials. A chapter on historical background provides the general setting, focussing on issues that contribute to an understanding of Han YÜ's life and times.

This is followed by five chapters in the general format of a chronological biography (nien-p'u) of Han YÜ. This format permits us to see Han YÜ's thoughts and actions in context. The biography has been made fairly complete because there is, at the time of writing, no complete biography of Han YÜ available in any Western language. The sources used are nearly all Chinese. Maximum use has been

made of materials dating to Han YÜ's own lifetime. This does not guarantee their accuracy, of course, but it does minimize the effects of distortions due to the image which he enjoyed in later times.

Most of the primary source materials relevant to a study of Han YÜ's life have been incorporated into the biographical chapters of Lo Lien-t'ien's Han YÜ yen-chiu (Han YÜ Studies).<sup>10</sup> Because some of these materials are otherwise difficult to obtain, and because Lo's is the best biography of Han YÜ in Chinese, I have frequently cited his text even though the same materials are also available in other sources. When referring to Han YÜ's own writings, I have cited them in the standard modern editions edited by Ma Ch'i-ch'ang (prose) and Ch'ien Chung-lien (poetry).<sup>11</sup> These editions note textual variants in the many editions of Han YÜ's prose and poetry, and include annotation which draws on traditional sources from the T'ang up to the nineteenth century. I have given specific page references to Han YÜ's writings in these editions so that the reader who knows Chinese may refer to the entire text of a piece rather than

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<sup>10</sup> Lo Lien-t'ien, Han YÜ yen-chiu (Taipei: Hsueh-sheng shu-chü, 1977). Hereafter cited as HYYC.

<sup>11</sup> Ma Ch'i-ch'ang, ed., Han Ch'ang-li wen-chi chiao-chu (Han YÜ's Collected Prose Collated and Annotated) (Taipei: Shih-chieh shu-chü, 1972). Hereafter cited as HCLC. Ch'ien Chung-lien, ed., Han Ch'ang-li shih hsi-nien chi-shih (Han YÜ's Poems Chronologically Arranged and Annotated) (Taipei: Shih-chieh shu-chü, 1977). Hereafter cited as HCLS.

only the excerpts quoted by Lo, because sometimes such excerpts read out of context may produce a misleading impression.

To facilitate cross-reference to other English language works on T'ang history, in my references to the source materials for T'ang history I have tried to use standard editions and abbreviations such as those cited on pages xiv and xv of volume three of The Cambridge History of China (cited above).

I have indicated the sources for important dates and events in Han YÜ's life, but I have not thought it necessary to describe in detail every question that has been raised by traditional critics over the last thousand years. The reader who is interested in such matters is referred to Lo Lien-t'ien and the sources he cites.

A major omission in my biography of Han YÜ is an account of his development as a writer. As I have stated above, there are already several studies of this topic in English. There is, as well, an extensive secondary literature in both Chinese and Japanese on Han YÜ as a writer, most of it of very little use for a study of this kind. Rather than say nothing at all about this subject, I have included a summary of Han YÜ's literary theory at the point in his biography when it seems likely that many of his literary views took shape. My summary relies heavily on the views of Charles Hartman because his interpretation

of Han Yü coincides most closely with my own, which I had formed independently before encountering Hartman's work.

I have added interpretive comments when it seemed appropriate to do so. Some of these comments are necessarily in the nature of an "educated guess." This is unavoidable because the biographical information which T'ang writers thought worth recording about an individual was often different from what a modern historian would wish to know. Moreover, much of what we know about Han Yü comes from biographical materials prepared after his death by his friends and followers. Such materials naturally sought to present their subject in a favorable light. These became, in turn, major source materials for the biographies of Han Yü which were included in the two standard histories of the T'ang, the Old T'ang History (Chiu T'ang Shu or simply T'ang Shu)<sup>12</sup> and the New T'ang History (Hsin T'ang Shu).

While there were certainly honest historians in T'ang China who tried to write objective histories (objective at least from their point of view), it is known that the official histories of the reign periods during which Han Yü was politically active underwent several revisions in which controversial materials were altered or excised. Some of this material may have concerned Han Yü

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<sup>12</sup> Liu Hsü (887-946), ed., Chiu T'ang Shu, 16 vols. (945; Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1975). Hereafter cited as CTS.

either directly or indirectly. We know, for example, that one of the records which was revised was the "veritable record" (shih-lu) of the T'ang emperor Shun-tsung which had been prepared by Han YÜ. Although this record is presently included among Han YÜ's collected works, serious questions have been raised as to whether it actually reflects Han YÜ's views in its present form.

Stories which circulated orally for some time before they were written down may have been subject to embellishment by storytellers as they passed from one person to another. Such tales may still be essentially true, but they should be used with some caution. It also happened on occasion that elements from one story might enter into another story where they originally had no place. This may account for some of the more fantastic elements in Han YÜ's biography, such as his expelling the crocodiles from Ch'ao-chou in 819.<sup>13</sup>

Much of what we know about Han YÜ comes from his own writings, but here, too, we often fail to find what we would like to know. Ideally, we would like to know what motivated him to write each text that we examine. What were the circumstances in which it was written? When

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. the discussion of similar questions in relation to the biography of Li Ao in chapter three of Timothy Hugh Barrett, Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism in the Thought of Li Ao (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1978).

meanings are ambiguous is it by accident, or simply a matter of literary convention, or is he deliberately being obscure because he doesn't dare to speak more directly? Han YÜ is much more daring in his writing than many of his contemporaries, but were there some topics that daunted him as well? We can only speculate and hope that as more specialized studies of T'ang history become available it will be possible to fill in at least some of the gaps.

While some information on the intellectual climate of Han YÜ's time has been included in the chapter on the historical background, further details on this topic have been deferred for inclusion in a separate chapter preceding discussion of those of Han YÜ's writings which relate to his thought, but which cannot be fitted conveniently into the biographical chapters. It is hoped that this will make it easier for the reader to see how Han YÜ's thought fits into the general intellectual context of the T'ang.

With the background provided by the previous chapters, we are able to see that the texts for which Han YÜ is best known, "An Inquiry into the Way" and the "Memorial on the Buddha's Bone," are rather extreme examples of only one aspect of his thought. We can find a number of examples in his collected works that show him to be more flexible and less intolerant than these two texts might lead us to believe.

I have not attempted to include every one of Han YÜ's prose pieces which relates to his thought, only a representative selection which illustrates the points which I wish to emphasize. I believe that the selections which I have chosen are adequate to fairly represent Han YÜ's views when read in conjunction with the previous chapters.

If the picture of Han YÜ that emerges from this study is somewhat more moderate than we might have thought, it is true, nevertheless, that he is still a Confucian and still a conservative. We may hope, therefore, that by gaining a deeper understanding of Han YÜ's Confucianism and his conservative views, we might also obtain a more accurate indication of the parameters of Confucian conservatism at an early stage of the T'ang-Sung transition.



## THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The issues that concerned Han Yü and the range of choices available to him to deal with them were largely determined by the historical context in which he found himself. The specific context was China under the T'ang dynasty during the years 768 to 824 (i.e., the years of his life). However, some of the issues that were important during this period were the result of trends and events that had their beginnings in an earlier time. Therefore if one wishes to understand the circumstances of Han Yü's life it is useful to know something of that earlier time.

In later generations, men looked back to the T'ang as a golden age. At the height of its power the T'ang dynasty was the greatest empire in Asia, perhaps the greatest in the world. It dominated its neighbors politically and militarily, and its power was matched by its cultural brilliance. The T'ang was the period of China's greatest poets; and its capital was the greatest metropolis in the world, its cosmopolitan splendor reflecting the self-confidence of its ruling elite.

However, the most glorious period of the T'ang dynasty was already past when Han Yü was born. In 768 the dynasty was still recovering from the effects of a great

rebellion that had nearly destroyed it.<sup>1</sup> An Lu-shan (703-757), the original leader for whom the rebellion is named, had been assassinated in 757, less than two years after the fighting began in 755. Officially, the rebellion had ended in 763 with the death of its last leader, Shih Ch'ao-i. By this time, however, the position of the court was so weak that it could not demand unconditional surrender of the rebels who remained undefeated. Consequently, an accommodation was reached by which the commanders of rebel forces which were firmly entrenched in local areas were given official appointments by the court and allowed to remain where they were in return for a formal pledge of loyalty to the throne. The areas under rebel control were thus technically restored to the empire, but in practice they remained beyond the emperor's jurisdiction. It was one of the primary goals of the emperors who ruled China during Han YÜ's lifetime to regain direct control over these areas.

To complicate the situation further, the court could not be certain of the reliability of its own troops. Time and again during the rebellion the court had shown itself

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<sup>1</sup> There is a brief description of this rebellion in The Cambridge History of China, chapter 8, pp. 474-486. More detailed information may be found in E. G. Pulleyblank, The Background of the Rebellion of An Lu-shan (London: Oxford University Press, 1955); Robert des Rotours, Histoire de Ngan Lou-chan (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1962); Howard S. Levy, Biography of An Lu-shan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960).

inept at coordinating military campaigns and providing supplies and reinforcements when and where they were needed. Some generals had responded by establishing power bases of their own independent of central control. These generals were not openly disloyal but they had little confidence in the civil bureaucracy of the central government and they might resist with military force if their authority were threatened. It was possible for the court to appoint officials to and collect taxes from these areas, but only with the cooperation of the generals (who usually bore the title of military governor, chieh-tu shih). Several times during Han YÜ's lifetime the court attempted to bring these areas back under its direct control. Emperor Te-tsung (r. 779-805) nearly lost his throne in such an attempt that failed in the early 780's. Hsien-tsung (r. 805-820) was more successful, but only after a prolonged period of military conflict.<sup>2</sup> A major political consequence of the rebellion of An Lu-shan was thus a reversal of the trend toward centralization that had characterized the reign of

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<sup>2</sup> On the reign of Hsien-tsung, see The Cambridge History of China, pp. 522-538 and 611-635; and Charles A. Peterson, "The Restoration Completed: Emperor Hsien-tsung and the Provinces," in Arthur F. Wright and Denis Twitchett, eds., Perspectives on the T'ang (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), pp. 151-191.

Hsüan-tsung (r. 713-756).<sup>3</sup> A new administrative layer was added to the central government as the empire was divided into provinces (literally "circuits", tao) under military governors or civil governors (kuan-ch'a shih, translated by Hucker as "surveillance commissioner"). These provinces were not full-fledged administrative units like the provinces of the Ming and Ch'ing dynasties. Basic local administration remained in the hands of prefects (tz'u-shih) and magistrates (hsien-ling) as before, although the governor might also hold the concurrent rank of prefect of the principal prefecture of a province.

The leading officials of districts (hsien) and prefectures (chou) were normally appointed by the central government except in those areas where a military governor exercised an effective veto power over such appointments. It should be noted, however, that not all military governors were independent-minded generals. The title could also be granted to high-ranking civilian officials. The custom developed, for example, of giving such appointments to outgoing chief ministers. Although all military governors had a large body of trained soldiers under their command (civil governors did not), there was an important difference among them in the nature of the relationship between the

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Pulleyblank, Background, ch. 4. Negative reaction to this policy of centralization may have been a contributing factor in building support for An Lu-shan.

governor and his troops. The armies of the most powerful military governors were bound to them by ties of personal loyalty, whereas governors who owed their positions solely to appointment by the throne were often strangers to the men they commanded.

It was still possible, of course, for an imperial appointee to win the respect of his troops, and it was equally possible for a veteran general to alienate them. In either case, the question of loyalty depended as much on the personal qualities of the commander as on recognition of his right to command by virtue of his rank in the civil or military bureaucracy. The importance of personality is reflected in the frequency of local rebellions provoked by disputes over who would be the successor to a popular general. Han Yü barely escaped being caught up in such a rebellion after the death of Tung Chin in 799.

The reverse side of this emphasis on personality is the weakness of bureaucratic authority revealed by the knowledge that such authority was not universally recognized throughout the T'ang empire. If local troops could ignore imperial decrees and reject imperial appointees and get away with it, the very concept of a unified Chinese empire was in jeopardy. Possible alternatives included the breakup of the empire into a number of competing kingdoms, as happened during the period of disunity from 304 to 518, or a

redefinition of the concept of empire to allow for greater local autonomy, perhaps even a confederation of semi-independent provinces joined together in voluntary cooperation.

The last alternative, which sounds reasonable enough in a modern context, was so outlandish in Han Yü's time that it was never considered. The T'ang empire finally did fall apart, but not until 907, long after Han Yü's death. How did the empire survive for so long, despite the centrifugal forces that threatened to dismember it? Part of the reason must be that none of the threatening forces was strong enough by itself to overthrow the empire, and they did not trust one another enough to form a lasting alliance. Beyond this, however, the T'ang government was able to adopt a variety of different tactics to deal with a changing situation without ever abandoning the ideal of a centralized bureaucratic empire.

In the period immediately following the rebellion, the chief concern of the T'ang court was to ensure its own continued survival--by whatever means necessary. This meant, on the one hand, that Tai-tsung (r. 762-779) and his representatives had to be very cautious not to antagonize the men who controlled powerful military forces, even though they were technically his subordinates, lest the country again be plunged into civil war. Perhaps Tai-tsung lacked

the personal qualities of a strong leader anyway, but under the circumstances his options were severely limited.

On the other hand, the very fact that conventional administrative procedures could not be fully implemented presented new opportunities to those who could find alternate ways of solving governmental problems. With its survival at stake, the court was willing to consider alternatives that would have been unacceptable under less urgent conditions.

A good example of a serious problem that was solved through the use of unorthodox methods (and one which indirectly affected Han YÜ) is the rebuilding of the imperial financial system.<sup>4</sup> Already in need of renovation before the rebellion began, by the time it was over the financial system was in near total disarray. The court desperately needed revenue to pay the salaries of officials and of those troops who remained loyal, as well as to repair the physical damage caused by the long years of warfare.

Under normal circumstances this revenue would have come from regular taxes imposed uniformly throughout the empire in the form of grain, cloth, labor service, and local

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<sup>4</sup> The basic sources on the T'ang financial system are D. C. Twitchett, Financial Administration under the T'ang Dynasty, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970); and Chü Ch'ing-yüan, T'ang-tai ts'ai-cheng shih (History of T'ang Financial Administration) (1943; Taipei: Shih-huo ch'u-pan she, 1978).

products. These taxes would have been collected by local officials based on records of households which had theoretically been granted equal allotments of land in proportion to the size and makeup of each family (the "equal field" system). However, the local census records which provided the basis for the periodic redistribution of land were badly out of date and throughout much, if not all, of the empire no redistribution of land had taken place for many years despite the fact that the rebellion had occasioned massive movements of population.

If conditions had returned to what they were before the rebellion, the task of rebuilding the financial system along its former lines would have been difficult and time consuming, but not insurmountable. However, the situation was complicated by the court's inability to enforce its orders in all parts of the empire. Military commanders who had taken over the apparatus for the collection of local revenues to provide for their own support were extremely reluctant to return control over those revenues to the central government. These areas, which included much of north China, therefore remained beyond the reach of the throne's tax collectors, and made it necessary for the court to seek out alternate sources of revenue.

This urgent need for revenue created an opportunity for men who had exceptional talent in the field of finance.



Two such men appeared, and between them devised the means to keep the empire solvent until the time when the court once again felt strong enough and confident enough to attempt to reassert its authority over the provinces which had previously resisted it.

Ti-wu Ch'ï (710-780)<sup>5</sup> and Liu Yen (718-780)<sup>6</sup> both rose to the highest levels of the T'ang government due to their ability to find solutions to the court's financial problems. Their most important reform was the development of a government monopoly on the production of salt, which became a major source of revenue in the period immediately following the rebellion.

Although the concept of a government monopoly on salt was not new, the circumstances of its re-introduction in the T'ang dynasty gave it unprecedented importance. Since nearly all the major salt-producing areas were in territory which the government still controlled, a salt tax could provide access to revenue from other areas where direct taxation was not possible. From a modest beginning when it was first proposed to Su-tsung (r. 756-762) by Ti-wu Ch'ï in 758, the revenue from the salt monopoly increased to

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<sup>5</sup> Biographies in CTS 123, pp. 3511-3516; HTS 149, pp. 4801-4802.

<sup>6</sup> Biographies in CTS 123, pp. 3511-3516; HTS 149, pp. 4793-4800; Chü Ch'ing-yüan, Liu Yen p'ing-chuan (A Critical Biography of Liu Yen) (1937; Taipei: Shang-wu yin-shu kuan, 1970).

the point that by 780 it was the source of more than half of the government's cash income.<sup>7</sup>

The success of the salt monopoly was due in large part to the administrative genius of Liu Yen, who assembled and trained a large staff to carry out its operations from his base at Yang-chou where the Grand Canal joined the Yangtze. In addition to his responsibility for the salt monopoly in southern China,<sup>8</sup> Liu Yen was concurrently transportation commissioner (chuan-yün shih) in which capacity he re-opened the Grand Canal and built a fleet of ships which carried not only salt, but also tax grain and cloth and local tribute items from the Yangtze valley to the capital at Ch'ang-an. Due to his efforts the financial strain on the court was greatly reduced, and consequently he wielded great power.

Even though Liu Yen consistently employed his power in the court's behalf, the potential danger should he ever become disaffected was so great that it could not help but cause uneasiness among those who wished to restore the authority of the central government over the whole country. When the first serious attempt at reform was made late in Tai-tsung's reign, Liu Yen was on the side of the reformers,

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<sup>7</sup> Twitchett, Financial Administration, pp. 52, 276.

<sup>8</sup> North China, which was less important in this regard, was under the authority of the Department of Public Revenue (tu-chih, in Twitchett's translation).

but the alliance could not be a secure one as long as Liu symbolized administrative values directly opposed to those of the established bureaucracy. His headquarters far from the capital with a staff selected by himself represented the sort of centrifugal tendency that the bureaucracy wished to reverse, and his emphasis on technical expertise in the selection of personnel differed sharply from the bureaucracy's preference for cultivated gentlemen from good families.

In all probability Liu Yen's departures from standard bureaucratic practice were motivated by a desire for greater efficiency in the enterprises under his command, and not by any intention to alter bureaucratic standards. A similarly practical motivation may well lie behind his participation in a plot to overthrow Yüan Tsai (d. 777), the chief minister who had dominated the court during most of Tai-tsung's reign.<sup>9</sup> Yüan was deposed in 777 and executed along with his entire family, while those who were identified as members of his faction were demoted and exiled. This treatment of his followers was more or less standard political procedure at the time, but it had the defect of punishing the innocent along with the guilty.

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<sup>9</sup> Biographies in CTS 118, pp. 3409-3416; HTS 145, pp. 4711-4715. See also The Cambridge History of China, pp. 576-578.

Yüan Tsai was corrupt, but he was not incompetent. He knew how to recognize men of ability and was willing to employ them as long as it was not to his disadvantage to do so. He had, for example, lent his support to the financial innovations of Ti-wu Ch'i and Liu Yen. There was at the same time a sizeable pool of young men from respectable backgrounds who had talent and ambition, but who lacked the personal connections which were all but indispensable for entry into and advancement within the bureaucracy. Such men might accept patronage wherever they could find it, for otherwise they might never have the opportunity to demonstrate their abilities and realize their ambitions. Therefore, the fact that a man accepted a position in Yüan Tsai's administration did not necessarily mean that he supported Yüan's corrupt activities. After all, Yüan had been in power since 764 and had already made arrangements to provide his own successor upon his retirement, so who could be sure that his faction would not remain in power for many years to come?

This may help to explain how it was that Han Yü's older brother, Han Hui (736-780), came to be a part of Yüan Tsai's administration. Han Hui's office was not high and he was not personally accused of any corrupt activities, but he was dismissed from his post and subsequently exiled to the malarial south where he died in 780, just as other former

members of Yüan Tsai's faction were returning to power under a new emperor.

Te-tsung assumed the throne in 779 determined to restore the court to the position it had enjoyed under Hsüan-tsung before the rebellion. At 37 he was old enough to remember the glories of Hsüan-tsung's reign and experienced enough to have a mind of his own so that he would not permit any chief minister to dominate him as Yüan Tsai had dominated Tai-tsung. Yet, he was still politically naive in some respects. He badly underestimated the strength of the resistance that would be provoked by his attempts at reasserting the authority of the throne. Moreover, he lacked the patience and the diplomatic skill to manipulate his opponents so that their strength could be divided and they could be dealt with one at a time as the opportunity presented itself.

Te-tsung found support for his ambitions among those officials whose fortunes depended on the success of the central government. These officials were as anxious as the emperor to bring the breakaway territories back under direct government control, but they did not all share the emperor's feelings about how power should be distributed between the throne and the civil bureaucracy. It is true that this situation existed to some extent under all dynasties, but it was particularly significant for the T'ang because the

emperor was weaker and the highest officials were stronger than under later dynasties. There were many men in the T'ang government who came from elite backgrounds and whose social status did not depend solely on their position in the imperial bureaucracy. Such men were less easily awed by the imperial presence than their colleagues of humbler origin and they were readier to argue with the ruler over policies and methods of administration. None of them individually had enough power to threaten the emperor directly, but together they formed a group that he could not afford to alienate.<sup>10</sup>

Yang Yen (727-781), the chief minister who directed the first stage of Te-tsung's attempt to restore central authority, did not come from the highest level of the elite, but he was appointed on the recommendation of Ts'ui Yu-fu (721-780), who did come from the highest level of the elite.<sup>11</sup> Yang Yen had been Yüan Tsai's designated successor, so his appointment signalled the return to power of many of those who had been removed from office when Yüan was deposed.

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. David Johnson, The Medieval Chinese Oligarchy (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1977), ch. 7.

<sup>11</sup> Yang Yen's biographies are in CTS 118, pp. 3409-3416; and HTS 145, pp. 4711-4713. On Ts'ui Yu-fu, see Patricia Buckley Ebrey, The Aristocratic Families of Early Imperial China (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), pp. 186-187.

The most important reform of the new administration was a major restructuring of the financial system. Upon Yang Yen's recommendation, a number of existing taxes were consolidated into a simplified tax assessment payable in two installments in summer and autumn. The implementation of the two-tax system (liang-shui fa) represented more than just a simplification of the tax system, however. It constituted tacit recognition of changes that had taken place since the beginning of the dynasty. By basing tax assessments on land and personal property rather than on the number of adult males, the court effectively acknowledged that land was now being bought and sold and that it was no longer equally distributed among the people (if indeed it ever had been). The current political situation was recognized in the fact that the tax quotas for each province were not based only on property assessments but were determined by negotiations between the military governors and special commissioners sent out by the court. Only a part of the taxes collected under the new system were actually sent on to the capital. Another part was to be retained at the local level to cover the expenses of local administration.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Twitchett, Financial Administration, pp. 39-43, 157-164; T'ao Hsi-sheng and Chü Ch'ing-yüan, T'ang-tai ching-chi shih (An Economic History of the T'ang) (1936; Taipei: Shang-wu yin-shu kuan, 1972), pp. 152-162.

In this way the central government regained at least some degree of control over revenues which had been lost to it, while those provinces which were effectively autonomous retained most of their autonomy. The initial returns from the new system were quite encouraging, for in the first year it brought in more revenue than all sources combined in 779, including the salt monopoly. This was important because control over its finances was essential if the court hoped to build up its strength sufficiently to regain full political control over the empire. Since the power of the independent military governors was based on the strength of their armies, the court had to be prepared to field strong armies of its own against them, and armies had to be fed and paid in order to ensure their continued loyalty.

But the restoration of his power that Te-tsung hoped for was not to be. Political infighting among his officials and his own overconfidence both contributed to the failure of his attempt to reassert his authority.

It was one of the goals of the reform to make the court less dependent on revenues from the salt monopoly. It succeeded in attaining this goal, but Liu Yen still wielded more power than the court wished any official to hold. At the same time, Yang Yen felt honor bound to avenge his former patron, Yüan Tsai, and he held Liu Yen responsible for Yüan's death. Consequently, in 780 Liu Yen was first



stripped of his commissionerships, and later executed on charges of plotting against the throne. Yang Yen has been blamed for arranging Liu Yen's death as a matter of revenge, but even if this were true (and it is not certain that it is), it is hardly conceivable that he could have done so if it were contrary to the emperor's wishes. It is likely that Te-tsung felt that the potential threat from Liu's power outweighed the value of his financial expertise and that he was relieved to be rid of him.<sup>13</sup> Aside from his involvement in this affair, it appears that Yang Yen was a capable chief minister, but he was just as proud and stubborn as the emperor and Te-tsung found his arrogant attitude irritating.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, he was potentially a powerful faction leader with followers of his own as well as what was left of Yüan Tsai's faction. The policies he advocated suggest that he may have represented the interests of the civil bureaucracy more than those of the emperor.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Another possible reason for Te-tsung to feel hostility toward Liu Yen is contained in a story related by Sau-ma Kuang (1019-1086) in which Liu was said to have been involved in an unsuccessful attempt to replace the future Te-tsung's mother as empress and set up the son of the new empress as heir apparent. This story cannot be confirmed, however. See Tzu-chih t'ung-chien (Universal Mirror for Aid in Government); hereafter cited as TCTC) (1084; Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1976) 226, p. 7276.

<sup>14</sup> An example of the friction between them is contained in the biography of Li Pi (722-789) in HTS 139, p. 4637.

<sup>15</sup> E.g., reducing the financial power of the eunuchs, who sometimes acted as personal agents of the emperor.

Te-tsung felt more comfortable with Lu Ch'i (dates unknown), the rough mannered descendant of one of the most eminent lineages of the T'ang, who was appointed chief minister in 781.<sup>16</sup> Unlike Yang Yen, Lu Ch'i was willing to tell the emperor what he wanted to hear. Not surprisingly, Lu Ch'i and Yang Yen did not get along, and before the year was over Yang Yen had been removed from office on charges of secretly harboring imperial pretensions. He was sentenced to distant exile and then, after he was safely out of the capital and on his way, a eunuch was sent after him with orders for him to commit suicide.

Two powerful civilian officials who might have interfered with Te-tsung's pursuit of his own policies were thus eliminated at the beginning of his reign. There is no proof that the emperor personally engineered the deaths of either Liu Yen or Yang Yen, but he did nothing to save either one when it was clearly in his power to do so. Te-tsung did not like strong chief ministers, especially if they had large numbers of political supporters.

In order to make himself less dependent on his high officials for political advice, Te-tsung relied increasingly on the scholars of the Han-lin Academy, whose role had changed from that of mere academic specialists in

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<sup>16</sup> Biographies in CTS 135, pp. 3713-3718; HTS 223B, pp. 6351-6354 (in the section devoted to "evil ministers"). He belonged to the Lu lineage of Fan-yang.

Hsüan-tsung's reign to personal advisers of the emperor under Tai-tsung.<sup>17</sup> He soon found himself in need of good advice, for a new rebellion began in 781 which almost cost him his throne.

The immediate stimulus for the rebellion was Te-tsung's refusal to sanction the hereditary succession to the governorship of Ch'eng-te province (in present Hopei province). Ch'eng-te was joined in rebellion by other provinces that also had a stake in maintaining the status quo. Despite initial victories by armies of the central government, the tide of battle soon turned against Te-tsung as some of his own best generals joined the rebellion after the emperor failed to reward them adequately for their successes. The high point of the rebel advance took place in 783 when rebel troops occupied the capital and Te-tsung was forced to flee to the west to escape them. Imperial forces recaptured the city the next year and the emperor was able to return, but his armies were unable to defeat the rebels on their home ground. This rebellion, like the rebellion of An Lu-shan, concluded with no complete victory for either side. Te-tsung kept his throne, but the provinces that started the rebellion kept their autonomy as well.

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<sup>17</sup> On the Han-lin Academy in this period, see The Cambridge History of China, pp. 595-596.

The rebellion ended in 786, the same year that the young Han Yü arrived in Ch'ang-an hoping to begin a career in government service. By this time Te-tsung was thoroughly disillusioned. He did not trust his officials and so came to rely more and more on personal advisors such as the Han-lin scholars and eunuchs whose status depended solely on their service to the emperor. Eunuch power increased greatly during Te-tsung's reign as they were given permanent command of the Shen-ts'ue Army which included the palace armies stationed at the capital. Excessive eunuch influence in government affairs had been one of the targets of Yang Yen's reforms, but now the foundation was laid for a significant expansion of that influence. Te-tsung was able to control his eunuchs and use them for his own purposes, but in later reigns the eunuchs became a political force to be reckoned with.

Much of the financial benefit from Yang Yen's reforms was lost as a result of the rebellion, so the court had to rely once again on income from the salt monopoly. Once the rebellion was over, the government was again faced with the problem of provinces which refused to submit their quota of tax revenues. However, a process of deflation since the time when quotas were assessed for the two-tax system meant that taxes which were assessed in terms of cash but paid in kind (as most taxes were) brought in more

revenue for the state. Detailed criticism of the abuses which had crept into the tax system were included in a memorial submitted in 794 by the chief minister Lu Chih (754-805), a former Han-lin academician who had been one of the emperor's closest advisors during the rebellion. Nevertheless, no major reform was undertaken until 809 under Te-tsung's grandson, the emperor Hsien-tsung. For the remainder of his reign Te-tsung concentrated on protecting his position and accumulating financial resources (which were later put to good use by Hsien-tsung).<sup>18</sup>

Some progress had been made in strengthening the financial foundations of the court (at the expense of increased hardships for the taxpayers), but the country remained divided. The effectiveness of the central administration continued to be limited by factional disputes between groups of officials who often seemed to be more interested in advancing their own interests and blocking their political opponents than in solving the problems of the empire. The frequent conflicts of interest between the emperor and his officials contrast sharply with the legendary and highly idealized relationship that was

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<sup>18</sup> Denis Twitchett, "Lu Chih (754-805): Imperial Adviser and Court Official," in Arthur F. Wright and Denis Twitchett, eds., Confucian Personalities (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1962), pp. 116-118; Peterson, "Restoration Completed," pp. 179-181.

believed to have existed at the beginning of the dynasty between the emperor T'ai-tsung (r. 626-649) and his ministers.<sup>19</sup>

If disunity at the highest levels of government contributed to the political instability of the post-rebellion period, why did it exist? Was there a general deterioration of moral values among the governing class that prevented them from setting aside their personal interests in order to pursue a common goal that would benefit everyone? Had some change occurred in T'ang society that compelled those with political ambitions to behave in a more competitive manner?

On the surface little had changed since the beginning of the dynasty. The highest posts in the government continued to be held by members of elite families that had provided such officials for generations, often with histories going back hundreds of years. There were some high officials from non-elite backgrounds, such as Chang Chiu-ling (678?-740) who served as chief minister under

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<sup>19</sup> The classic statement of this ideal relationship is Wu Ching (670-747), Chen-kuan cheng-yao (Essentials of Government in the Chen-kuan Period (627-649)) (705; Shanghai: Ku-chieh ch'u-pan she, 1978). For a more modern interpretation, see Howard J. Wechsler, Mirror to the Son of Heaven: Wei Cheng at the Court of T'ang T'ai-tsung (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), ch. 4.

Hsüan-tsung from 734 to 737, but in general the same class provided the highest officials throughout the dynasty.<sup>20</sup>

However, just because most officials came from the same social class does not mean that they always agreed with one another. Recent studies by Howard Wechsler have shown that even the relationship between T'ang T'ai-tsung and his ministers was not as perfect as tradition made it out to be.<sup>21</sup> Ch'en Yin-k'o, in a pioneering study which was first published in 1944, pointed to a conflict of interests between old elite families of the northeast and the more recently arisen elite of the northwest (which included the T'ang imperial family). According to Professor Ch'en the northwestern elite, which had its base in the Kuan-chung area where the capital was located, dominated the early years of the dynasty, but when Empress Wu usurped the throne in 691 she wished to weaken the political influence of the old elite which had supported the T'ang, and favored instead new men from the south and east who were largely recruited through the use of civil service examinations.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Johnson, Medieval Oligarchy, pp. 121-152.

<sup>21</sup> Wechsler, Mirror to the Son of Heaven, pp. 135-154, 193-196; The Cambridge History of China, ch. 4.

<sup>22</sup> Ch'en Yin-k'o, T'ang-tai cheng-chih shih shu-lun kao (A Tentative Discussion of T'ang Political History) (1944; Hong Kong: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1976), pp. 1-49.

More recent research by other scholars has caused this interpretation to be modified somewhat. Howard Wechsler has examined six cases during the reign of T'ai-tsung in which groups of officials disagreed over important political issues, and has found no evidence of common background factors linking the members of the factions thus formed.<sup>23</sup> David Johnson's study of the T'ang ruling elite (which he refers to as an oligarchy) led him to conclude that the reign of Empress Wu did not lead to the rise of a new class of officials chosen via the examination system.<sup>24</sup>

This does not mean that these factors were never important in the formation of political factions, but that other factors were often more important. Officials from the same area might find themselves on opposite sides of a particular issue while men from different status groups within the elite formed alliances that ignored their different social backgrounds. To illustrate this, we might note that Ts'ui Yu-fu, who recommended Yang Yen as chief minister, and Lu Ch'i, who helped bring about Yang's dismissal and death, were both descended from the most eminent northeastern lineages (the Ts'ui lineage of Po-ling and the Lu lineage of Fan-yang). We might further note that

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<sup>23</sup> Howard J. Wechsler, "Factionalism in Early T'ang Government," in Wright and Twitchett, Perspectives on the T'ang, pp. 87-120.

<sup>24</sup> Johnson, Medieval Oligarchy, p. 139.



despite his distinguished lineage Ts'ui Yu-fu had taken the civil service examination and earned the chin-shih degree, while Yang Yen held no degree (his father was a chin-shih, but declined an offer of official appointment from Hsüan-tsung).

The truth is that changes had taken place since the beginning of the dynasty that did affect the status of the elite. They had originally risen to a position of dominance in Chinese society through a combination of factors that included land ownership, military power, office holding, education, and alliances with other powerful families. Their rise began during the latter half of the Han dynasty (206 B.C.-220 A.D.), and their position was consolidated during the period of disunion which followed the fall of the Han. A relatively small number of elite lineages was able to control large areas of land which were farmed by their relatives and by peasant farmers who looked to their elite patrons for protection against bandits and tax collectors. Many of the short-lived dynasties that ruled north China during the period of disunion were founded by non-Chinese peoples who obtained the throne through military conquest. Since a large Chinese lineage with all its relatives and clients of various sorts could mobilize a substantial military force of its own, the foreign rulers often found it more practical to collaborate with such

lineages than to fight them. Under an administrative system that had its origins in the last years of the Han dynasty, the great families were able to obtain a monopoly on political offices in the provinces. Society was divided into a number of status groups which became hereditary, and access to office was limited to those who belonged to the appropriate status group. Elite lineages sought to preserve their status by intermarrying only with each other, providing their sons with a good education, maintaining genealogies to identify their members, and placing as many lineage members as possible in government offices.<sup>25</sup>

South China was similarly dominated by elite lineages. Changes of dynasty typically took place via palace coups that did not affect the structure of society. Many of these elite lineages of both north and south still existed at the beginning of the T'ang, and they retained their superior status. This presented something of a problem for the founders of the T'ang dynasty, since the traditional status of some of these lineages was higher than that of the T'ang imperial family. It was in the interest of the T'ang founders to reduce the influence of the elite lineages, but it had to be done in such a way as to avoid provoking them into starting another civil war. Some of the

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. Johnson, Medieval Oligarchy and Ebrey, Aristocratic Families, *passim*.

methods they adopted to accomplish this goal had been tried on a smaller scale under earlier dynasties. One such method struck at the economic foundation on which much of the power of the elite rested. The government assumed control over the distribution of farm land, which could no longer be freely bought and sold. Land was given to farm families under a formula which was intended to provide each adult male with an equal portion of arable land. Lesser portions were granted for the support of women, minors, and those not able to care for themselves. Except for small plots granted in perpetuity (for houses and mulberry trees), this land was subject to redistribution as individuals died or moved into different categories.

The Equal Field (chün-t'ien) system probably did not take land away from the elite lineages, but it did make it more difficult for them to expand their land holdings as they needed to do to provide a constant quality of life for an increasing number of descendants. Moreover, peasants who could expect to receive free land from the government at reasonable tax rates had little incentive to become tenants of the elite or to commend their land to them to escape taxation unless the elite offered very good terms which would, of course, limit their own profits. It is uncertain whether the Equal Field system was ever fully implemented throughout China, but documents from Tunhuang have shown

that it was at least partially implemented as far away as the western outskirts of the empire as late as 769.<sup>26</sup> Even if it was only partially implemented, however, it seems likely that it released a substantial number of peasants from economic dependence on the elite and correspondingly limited the major source of the elite's economic power.<sup>27</sup>

The military power of the elite was similarly diluted by the establishment of a garrison militia (fu-ping) system that created more than 600 small (from 800 to 1200 men) military units of soldier-farmers that trained in the agricultural off-season and served in rotation in the capital guards. These units were under the direct control of the central government and, along with the dynasty's regular armies, provided sufficient military forces to keep the peace so that there was little excuse for the local elite to maintain a fighting force of their own. It is true that many of the officers of the militia came from elite families, but they served as agents of the central government under the supervision of central authorities, not

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26 Ikeda On, "T'ang Household Registers and Related Documents," in Wright and Twitchett, Perspectives on the T'ang, pp. 121-150.

27 On the general characteristics of the "equal field" system, see Twitchett, Financial Administration, pp. 1-8; Wan Kuo-ting, "The System of Equal Land Allotments in Medieval Times," in E-tu Zen Sun and John De Francis, eds., Chinese Social History: Translations of Selected Studies (Washington: American Council of Learned Societies, 1956), pp. 157-184.

as independent leaders of bands of their personal followers. 28

The political power of the elite was also reduced by the loss of their hereditary right to hold certain offices. They could still become officials, but in order to do so they had to compete on a national level, and if they did then win appointment to a post at the prefectural or county level they could not expect to be assigned to the same area where their families had their economic base. Those who aspired to high posts in the central government found that in order to compete effectively they had to live in the capital. This usually required them to separate themselves from their ancestral home and from the agricultural lands that provided them with economic security. If a family remained separated from its original base for several generations, its links to that base were likely to become weaker while new connections bound it more closely to its new environment.

This process could lead to the fragmentation of a large lineage into a number of smaller sub-lineages that acted independently of one another even though they were identified by others in terms of their membership in the original lineage. There are no statistics to show how this

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28 See The Cambridge History of China, pp. 97-102; Pulleyblank, Background, pp. 61-62 and the sources referred to on p. 140.

process affected the elite as a whole, but an instructive example is provided by Patricia Buckley Ebrey's study of the Ts'ui family of Po-ling, one of the most eminent of the northeastern lineages.

Already by the early T'ang men who were descended from the original Ts'ui lineage could be quite distantly related to one another (sixth cousins). Their ancestral home was in An-p'ing county in what is now Hopei province, but during the T'ang many of them moved to other areas, especially the secondary T'ang capital of Lo-yang. Those who moved apparently did not retain any close connection with their kinsmen in their ancestral home. Moreover, even though there were many Ts'uis living in Lo-yang, they did not join together for ceremonies or ancestor worship and they did not maintain a common cemetery. The largest active kinship unit they formed corresponded to the traditional mourning group consisting of persons related to one another within five generations in the male line. Members of such groups were required by tradition to participate in one another's funerals, and in at least some cases they did offer mutual aid and cooperated in performing ancestral sacrifices and in maintaining a common graveyard. They recognized their kinship to other Ts'uis in Lo-yang, but they treated their distant relatives more or less as they did members of other prominent families. They did not form

a political bloc based on their kinship and might even compete with one another in politics.<sup>29</sup>

In place of birth as a qualification to hold political office the T'ang offered two alternatives. One was to pass a competitive civil service examination, and the other was via the yin (protection) privilege which permitted the sons and grandsons of high officials to enter government service in relatively low-ranking positions. The yin privilege differed from the system employed during the period of disunion in that heredity alone was no longer enough to qualify one for office. In order to qualify for the yin privilege, one's father or grandfather must have served the T'ang well enough to have been promoted at least to the fifth rank in government. Both methods of recruitment still favored the elite since they were more likely to be well educated than the non-elite, and they were also more likely to be related to high officials. Competition was greatly increased however, since not only did all levels of the elite have to compete with one another for appointment to government offices; now there were non-elite competitors as well.

Since there was no other source of employment that offered as much prestige as government service, competition for the available positions was keen. Unfortunately for the

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<sup>29</sup> Ebrey, Aristocratic Families, pp. 91-93.

many young gentlemen from good families who came to the capital in search of such employment, there were not enough good positions to go around. For that reason, even one who could qualify for a position either by passing an examination or via the yin privilege could not be certain of receiving an appointment. Sometimes there were ten times as many candidates as positions available.<sup>30</sup> Even men who had the right to claim the yin privilege might take an examination in hope of improving their chances of gaining a position. Han Yü noted that in his time some 3000 men might compete in the examination for the chin-shih ("presented scholar") degree conducted by the Ministry of Rites, and that only 200 of these could expect to advance to the selection examination conducted by the Ministry of Personnel which might finally lead to an appointment.<sup>31</sup>

Success in obtaining a position was not determined solely by the candidate's personal ability. It could be very helpful to have an influential patron. This was possible in the T'ang because the examination process was not then characterized by the extreme secrecy that became the rule in later dynasties. Candidates strove to make the

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30        30 HTS 45, p. 1175; there is a French translation of this passage in Robert des Rotours, Le Traite des Examen, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Chinese Materials Center, 1976), p. 246.

31 HCLC, p. 146.



acquaintance of important men who might recommend them to the examiners. Often they presented samples of their writing which they hoped would get the attention of a potential patron.<sup>32</sup> Those who obtained a position with the help of a patron naturally felt an obligation toward him and could be expected to support him politically. Later on, it was still helpful to have a patron to ensure timely promotions and to improve one's chances of getting a desirable post in the capital rather than an undesirable one far away in the provinces. One man might have several patrons at different stages of his career, to each of whom he owed a debt which was payable in terms of political support. Since patrons and clients tended to rise and fall together, it was in the client's interest to help keep his patron in power and this, in turn, contributed to the factional strife that complicated T'ang political life.

Even though politics continued to be dominated by men from elite backgrounds, the internal dynamics of elite society were different from what they had been during the long Period of disunion. The lineages that had formerly enjoyed the highest social status were still respected, but in the world of politics they were often overshadowed by members of lesser lineages and sometimes even by new men of

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. Victor Mair, "Scroll Presentation in the T'ang," Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies, vol. 38, no. 1 (1978), pp. 35-60.

non-elite origins. Large lineages like the Po-ling Ts'ui were effectively sub-divided into a number of sub-lineages each of whom sought its own fortune.

The gradual breakdown in the enforcement of the Equal Field system made it easier to acquire land for elite and non-elite alike. There were large estates controlled by wealthy families and Buddhist temples, but there were also opportunities for ordinary people and families from the lower levels of the elite to increase their holdings and thereby obtain the economic means to seek at least some degree of upward mobility.

The rebellion of An Lu-shan brought disaster to many, but left in its wake large areas of vacant land and a political vacuum--a circumstance that could be easily exploited by anyone favorably situated to take advantage of the opportunity. Many elite families fled to the relative safety of the south where some experienced impoverishment and misery, but others found new economic opportunities and some found a stimulating intellectual climate. It is among the displaced literati who sought refuge in the south that E. G. Pulleyblank finds the origins of the intellectual movements of the chen-yüan period (785-805) which he

considers to be "the era of greatest and most significant intellectual activity" of the post-rebellion period.<sup>33</sup>

Pulleyblank detects among these refugee intellectuals a new seriousness and activist sentiment along with a concern for social problems that contrasts with the period immediately prior to the rebellion when "men of character had tended to seek to maintain their personal integrity through withdrawal from the world or, at least, in the individualistic cultivation of such things as poetry, fine writing, or philosophy." Now even writers with Taoist tendencies who had previously remained aloof from political life exhibited a new spirit of social concern. Groups of educated young men met together to discuss contemporary political problems and those with scholarly interests turned to classical texts in search of ways to reform the world. One prominent group of young men who met in the area of what is now Nanking in the year 765 included Han Yü's older brother, Han Hui.<sup>34</sup>

It is not known precisely what Han Hui and his friends talked about, but some of the general characteristics of the new intellectual movement can be

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<sup>33</sup> Edwin G. Pulleyblank, "Neo-Confucianism and Neo-Legalism in T'ang Intellectual Life, 755-805," in Arthur F. Wright, ed., The Confucian Persuasion (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1960), pp. 77, 82.

<sup>34</sup> Pulleyblank, "Neo-Confucianism and Neo-Legalism," pp. 84-85.

described. One aspect was a more critical approach to the classics which was exemplified by a new interpretation of the Spring and Autumn Annals by the scholar Tan Chu (725-770) and his followers. Tan Chu criticized the traditional commentaries to the classic and proposed a new analysis of the original text. His disciple Chao K'uang (fl. 770) was critical of the standard T'ang commentaries on the classics for what he considered their excessive emphasis on punctuation and textual criticism when he felt it was more important to understand the general meaning of the classical texts. The ideas of Tan Chu and Chao K'uang were propagated by Lu Ch'un (fl. 775-804), who became an influential teacher in the capital. In Pulleyblank's words, "A new critical spirit was abroad which made men seek in the Classics for interpretations consonant with reason rather than merely consistent with the orthodox commentaries."<sup>35</sup>

Better known than the school of Tan Chu was the ku-wen ("ancient prose") movement which saw the means to bring about social and political reform in a return to the style and spirit of the great writers of the Chou (1027-256 B.C.) and Han dynasties. Advocates of ku-wen contended that the prose style known as "parallel prose" (p'ien-t'í wen), which had been dominant in elite society ever since the Period of

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<sup>35</sup> Pulleyblank, "Neo-Confucianism and Neo-Legalism," pp. 78, 88-90.

Disunion, was unsuitable for the expression of serious ideas since it required too much attention to aspects of style that they considered frivolous and superficial. For them, this symbolized the defects of contemporary society which seemed to value what was superficial while holding traditional Confucian virtues in too little esteem.<sup>36</sup>

While there had been periodic expressions of dissatisfaction with parallel prose ever since the last years of the Period of Disunion, such feelings took on the character of a movement only in the post-rebellion period. Its first leaders were already mature adults when the rebellion began and the oldest of them, Hsiao Ying-shih (706-758?), probably died before it ended. All of them were descended from old elite families, but neither they nor their immediate ancestors held high official posts. They had all earned the chin-shih degree and they all knew each other. They expressed Confucian sentiments in writings about history and literature, but these sentiments were expressed in a rather general way and not as aspects of a detailed program for reform. The Confucian concept that interested them the most was that of wen, whose meanings in

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<sup>36</sup> On ku-wen, see Diana Mei, Han Yü as a ku-wen Stylist (diss.), pp. 20-34; Georges Margouliès, Le Kou-wen Chinoises (Paris: Paul Guenther, 1926). On Parallel Prose, see James Robert Hightower, "Some Characteristics of Parallel Prose," in Studia Serica Bernhard Karlgren Dedicata (Copenhagen: Ejnar Munksgaard, 1959), pp. 60-91.

various contexts included literature, culture, pattern, and refinement, reflecting the values that were foremost for them.<sup>37</sup>

Their commitment to Confucian values was not exclusive, however. Yüan Chieh (719-772) was also interested in Taoism, while Hsiao Ying-shih and Li Hua (c. 710-c. 767) are known to have studied Buddhist sutras together. Tu-ku Chi (725-777) studied both Taoism and Buddhism.<sup>38</sup> His student Liang Su (d. 793)--whose patronage Han Yü is said to have sought while a candidate for the chin-shih degree --was a lay follower of T'ien-t'ai Buddhism who wrote a treatise on Buddhist meditation.<sup>39</sup>

Such eclectic interests were not unusual in the T'ang. Both Buddhism and religious Taoism flourished, due in part, at least, to imperial patronage. Both had developed substantial followings during the period of Disunion, and it was in the interest of the T'ang founders to obtain their support if possible. Stanley Weinstein has pointed out the importance of imperial patronage in determining the fortunes of different schools of Buddhism in

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<sup>37</sup> David McMullen, "Historical and Literary Theory in the Mid-Eighth Century," in Wright and Twitchett, Perspectives on the T'ang, pp. 307-342.

<sup>38</sup> McMullen, pp. 312-313.

<sup>39</sup> Barrett, Thought of Li Ao, pp. 162-181.

the early T'ang.<sup>40</sup> Taoism was singled out for favored treatment because of the fortunate coincidence that Li, the surname of the T'ang imperial family, was also the surname of Lao-tzu, the legendary founder of Taoism. Li was also the surname of another legendary figure in religious Taoism, Li Hung, a messianic leader destined to become a perfect ruler.<sup>41</sup> It was only natural that the T'ang rulers would exploit these coincidences for political purposes, but several T'ang emperors were personally interested in Taoist teachings, especially those concerning methods of attaining immortality (the deaths of several T'ang emperors has been attributed to their consumption of elixirs of immortality). The relative equality of Buddhism, Taoism and Confucian in the view of the T'ang court was symbolized in the custom of inviting representatives of all three teachings to debate one another on the occasion of the emperor's birthday.<sup>42</sup>

Because Buddhism was so influential in the T'ang, developments in Buddhist thought may sometimes be seen as reflecting general trends. Thus, Pulleyblank points to the

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<sup>40</sup> Stanley Weinstein, "Imperial Patronage in the Formation of T'ang Buddhism," in Wright and Twitchett, Perspectives on the T'ang, pp. 265-306.

<sup>41</sup> Anna Seidel, "The Image of the Perfect Ruler in Early Taoist Messianism: Lao-tzu and Li Hung," in History of Religions, vol. 9, nos. 2-3 (1969/70), pp. 216-247.

<sup>42</sup> Lo Hsiang-lin, T'ang-tai wen-hua shih (T'ang Cultural History) (Taipei: Shang-wu yin-shu kuan, 1974), pp. 159-176.

syncretism of T'ien-t'ai Buddhism which tried to harmonize the differences among different Buddhist schools by fitting them into different levels of a single system, and suggests that this prepared the way for Confucian writers to find equivalents to Buddhist metaphysical concepts in the Confucian classics.<sup>43</sup> Timothy Barrett, referring to Chinese Buddhism in the late eighth century, acknowledges the existence of eclectic tendencies among Buddhist thinkers who tried to reconcile the differences that separated Buddhist sects, citing the example of the monk Chiao-jan (734?-791?) who was a good friend of Liang Su. Barrett also notes, however, that those who studied the doctrines of other schools might become more conscious of what was distinctive in their own. He finds this tendency in both of the two greatest Buddhist thinkers of the time, Ch'eng-kuan (737-838) of the Hua-yen school and Chan-jan (711-782), ninth patriarch of the T'ien-t'ai school. Both men "exemplify an emergent awareness of doctrinal traditions as orthodoxies to be maintained."<sup>44</sup> Chan-jan was acquainted with members of the ku-wen movement, so it is perhaps not entirely coincidental that this attitude ascribed to him

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<sup>43</sup> Pulleyblank, "Neo-Confucianism and Neo-Legalism," p. 92.

<sup>44</sup> Barrett, Thought of Li Ao, pp. 167-170.



should be so similar to the attitude toward Confucianism exhibited by Han Yü and his followers.

All of the factors discussed so far constituted significant elements of the world into which Han Yü was born. As we examine his biography we shall see how he was affected by the social and political changes that had taken place since the beginning of the dynasty. We shall see as well how he responded to the political and intellectual issues of his time, and how he fits into the historical context outlined above.

## LIFE AS A STUDENT: 768 TO 795

Han YU was born in 768 (the month and day are not known) into an elite family of respectable, but not eminent, status. His father, Han Chung-ch'ing (d. 770), was magistrate of Wu-ch'ang on the Yangtze River during the early days of the rebellion of An Lu-shan, and then in 757 was transferred to the same post in P'o-yang in Kiangsi. An inscription praising his good administration of Wu-ch'ang is included in the collected works of the poet Li Po (701-762), and the Han Hui chuan (Account of Han Hui, which dates from the Sung) states that he was friendly with both Li Po and Tu Fu (712-770).<sup>1</sup> It is not known how long he remained at P'o-yang, but at the time of his death in 770 he held the rank of assistant in the imperial library (pi-shu lang). This was not a particularly high post (sixth degree, third class),<sup>2</sup> but it was located in the capital where

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<sup>1</sup> Li Po, Li T'ai-po ch'üan-chi (Complete Collection of Li Po's Works) (Taipei: Ho-lo t'u-shu ch'u-pan she, 1975) 29, pp. 670-673; Han Hui chuan in Ch'en Hung-ch'ih, ed., Ch'üan T'ang-wen chi-shih (Records of Matters Relating to the Complete T'ang Prose), 3 vols. (Preface dated 1873; Taipei: Shih-chieh shu-chü, 1967), v. 2, ch. 39, pp. 503-505.

<sup>2</sup> For T'ang official titles, in addition to Hucker one should also refer to Robert des Rotours, Traite des Fonctionnaires et Traite de l'Armee, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (San Francisco: Chinese Materials Center, 1974).

opportunities for advancement were better than in the provinces. Han YÜ's grandfather and great-grandfather had held slightly higher ranks (fifth degree, third class and fifth degree, fourth class respectively) as prefectural officials. More distant ancestors had held even higher ranks, including one who had been granted the title of prince under the Later Wei dynasty (386-534).<sup>3</sup>

Like other elite lineages, the Han lineage had been sub-divided at several times in the past so that in Han YÜ's time there were several lineages which traced their origins to a common ancestor in the distant past, but which had for many generations operated independently of one another. The most eminent Han lineage in the T'ang was the Han family of Ch'ang-li which included Han Huang (723-787) who took over Ti-wu Ch'ü's financial posts in 770, and who as governor of the Yangtze delta area in the 780's helped Te-tsung hold on to his throne.<sup>4</sup> Han YÜ is sometimes identified as a member of this lineage, but this identification is erroneous.<sup>5</sup> The

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<sup>3</sup> Li Ao, Tai-tseng Li-pu shang-shu Han-kung hsing-chuang (Account of Conduct of the Honorary Minister of the Ministry of Rites Lord Han (Han YÜ)) in Ch'üan T'ang-wen (Complete T'ang Prose), 20 vols. (1814; Taipei: Ta-t'ung shu-chü, 1979), vol. 13, ch. 639, pp. 22a-27b; Huang-fu Shih, Han Wen-kung mu-chih ming (Tomb Inscription for Han YÜ) in Ch'üan T'ang-wen, vol. 14, ch. 687, pp. 14a-16a; HTS 73A, pp. 2857-2859 (genealogy of the Han family).

<sup>4</sup> Biographies in CTS 129, pp. 3599-3603; HTS 126, 4434-4438. Genealogy in HTS 73A, pp. 2860-2873.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. HYYC, pp. 1-3.

error derives at least in part because Han YÜ called himself Han Ch'ang-li in some of his writings and many of his readers automatically assumed that he had adopted the name of his ancestral home. Since many prominent families had not actually resided at the location of their ancestral homes for many generations, and since different branches of a lineage were not necessarily in close contact with one another, such errors were easy to make. Han YÜ was probably aware of this and he was probably also aware of the assumptions that status-conscious T'ang readers would be likely to make upon encountering his self-designation. He had a well-developed sense of irony and he undoubtedly felt that he belonged in the same rank with his more illustrious cousins.

There has also been confusion regarding Han YÜ's place of residence. We have already seen that he was not from Ch'ang-li as some of his biographies claim. Other sources identify him as being from Nan-yang in southern Honan. This appears first in Li Po's inscription for Han Chung-ch'ing, and is repeated in Han YÜ's biography in the Hsin T'ang Shu.<sup>6</sup> In this case the error appears to be due, for Li Po at least, to mistaking Nan-yang for Ho-yang (it is possible that Li Po got this information from an informant rather than from Han Chung-ch'ing and that it was the

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<sup>6</sup> Li Po, p. 670; HTS 176, p. 5255.

informant's error). There is ample evidence in Han Yü's collected works to show that the family's permanent residence was at Ho-yang (present Meng-hsien in Honan). The strongest evidence in favor of this location is that this was where the family buried its dead, even if the death had occurred elsewhere.<sup>7</sup> Ho-yang was on the north side of the Yellow River, across the river and northwest from Lo-yang, the secondary capital of the T'ang.

Han Yü's place of birth is not specified in any of his biographies, but it was presumably either Ho-yang or Ch'ang-an. Nothing is known of his mother except that she died before he was two months old. He was cared for by a wet nurse named Li Cheng-chen who was twenty in 768 and who subsequently remained with the Han family until her death at the age of 63 in 811.<sup>8</sup>

He was only two years old (three sui) when his father died in 770. The responsibility for raising him then fell to his older brother Hui who was at this time already 32 years old. Because of the difference in their ages, it is possible that Han Yü and Han Hui had different mothers. In addition to Hui, Han Yü had two other older brothers,

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. HYYC, pp. 3-4.

<sup>8</sup> Han Yü's tomb inscription for his wet nurse is in HCLC, p. 324. It has been translated by Shih Shun Liu in Chinese Classical Prose (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1979), p. 81.

both of whom died young. One of these brothers, Chieh (the other's name is not known, nor are their dates), lived long enough to have two sons, Lao-ch'eng and Pai-ch'uan. Han Hui was apparently unable have sons of his own because he adopted Lao-ch'eng as his heir. Lao-ch'eng was somewhat younger than Han Yü (his birth date is not known), and as they lived together in the same household they became constant companions.<sup>9</sup>

Very little is known about the details of Han Hui's career. As we have seen in the previous chapter, in 765 he was in the south discussing statecraft. If he had not already returned to the north earlier, he certainly would have done so in 770 for his father's funeral. After that he was obliged to observe the traditional three years of mourning for his father, presumably at the family home in Ho-yang. In 774 he obtained a post at the capital and proceeded to Ch'ang-an, taking his family with him. No rank is specified for him until 777 when he was an imperial diarist (ch'i-chü she-jen). It was in the fourth month of this year that he was removed from office on charges of involvement with the faction of Yüan Tsai. Apparently he remained in government service, but in what capacity is not

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<sup>9</sup> Han Yü mentions this in his sacrificial prayer for his nephew, HCLC, pp. 195-198. This is translated in Liu, Chinese Classical Prose, pp. 83-89; and in Cyril Birch, ed., Anthology of Chinese Literature (New York: Grove Press, 1965), pp. 246-249 (translation by J. K. Rideout).

known. In 779 he was slandered at court and exiled to Shao-chou in northern Kwangtung where he died that same year at the age of 41.<sup>10</sup>

According to the Han Hui chuan, Hui was noted for his "pure speech" (ch'ing-yen), writings on morality, singing, and whistling. Both Hui and his uncle, Han Yün-ch'ing, were said to be followers of Hsiao Ying-shih and Li Hua, and Hui wrote ku-wen in the manner of Liang Su. A piece entitled Wen-heng ("An Evaluation of Literature") which is quoted in the Han Hui chuan laments the loss of classical standards in both ethical behavior and literature. Han Yü lived with his brother for some ten years and it is quite likely that the values he held in adult life owed something to Han Hui's influence.<sup>11</sup> After Hui's death the responsibility for managing the Han family's affairs passed to his widow. She was a member of one of the great families of the T'ang, the Chengs of Jung-yang. Her personal name is not known, but Han Yü praised her care for him in a sacrificial ode written on the occasion of her death in 794.<sup>12</sup> She supervised Han Yü's upbringing and education from 779 through 785.

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<sup>10</sup> HYVC, pp. 30-31; Han Hui chuan, pp. 504-505; TCTC 225, p. 7243.

<sup>11</sup> Han Hui chuan, pp. 504-505.

<sup>12</sup> HCLC, p. 194-195.

The family returned to Ho-yang, but did not remain there long, as the outbreak of rebellion in the northeast in 781 made their home in Ho-yang potentially unsafe. Han Yü's aunt then moved the whole family to Hsüan-ch'eng south of the Yangtze (in present Anhwei province) where they had an alternate residence (pieh-yeh). Pulleyblank suspects that Han Yü's father had obtained this property when he was serving in the south during the An Lu-shan rebellion.<sup>13</sup> Many years later, Han Yü recalled that although there were a "hundred mouths" to feed at Hsüan-ch'eng, his aunt was a good manager and consequently during his youth he never had cause to worry about his economic well-being.<sup>14</sup>

One cannot help but wonder how Han Yü's adult views might have differed if he had spent these years in the sophisticated atmosphere of Ch'ang-an or Lo-yang rather than in the relative isolation of Hsüan-ch'eng. As it was, there was probably little to distract him from the classical texts that formed the basis of a standard education. This resulted in a certain naivete that put him at a disadvantage when he first went to the capital, and it may also help to account for his exclusive commitment to Confucian values. Han Yü does not indicate whether he received his education

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<sup>13</sup> Pulleyblank, "Neo-Confucianism and Neo-Legalism," pp. 85 and 324 n. 24.

<sup>14</sup> HCLC, p. 195.



directly from Han Hui and Hui's widow, or whether they hired tutors to teach him. Presumably Han YU had access to his older brother's books, but he doesn't mention this, either, and his early reading appears to have been limited to the standard Confucian classics.

In 786, the year that the rebellion against Te-tsung ended, Han YU undertook the journey to Ch'ang-an to enter the competition for a career in government service. While enroute to the capital he wrote what some critics believe to be his first political statement in the form of a poem describing the Chung-t'iao mountains (inside the bend of the Yellow River) and the river in admiring terms. This has been taken by some to be veiled praise for a poor but virtuous gentleman named Yang Ch'eng who was then living in retirement in that area.<sup>15</sup> (Of course, it could be that he just admired the mountains.)

When he arrived in Ch'ang-an at the age of eighteen (nineteen sui), he soon discovered that he was not well prepared for life in the capital. He didn't know anyone. He remarks in a poem that, "Ch'ang-an has a million families, (yet) when I go out there is nowhere to go."<sup>16</sup> Looking back on this time in a letter written several years later, he acknowledges that, "I did not yet understand human

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<sup>15</sup> HCLS, p. 2; HYYC, pp. 33-34.

<sup>16</sup> HCLS, p. 3.

affairs. Reading the books of the sages, I took it that one's employment (as an official) was entirely for the sake of others, not to benefit oneself. When I reached the age of twenty (sui, i.e. in 787), suffering in poverty with insufficient food and clothing, seeking (help) from those who were close to me--only then did I understand that employment is not only for the sake of others."<sup>17</sup>

One possible source of assistance was lost to Han Yü in the intercalary fifth month of 787 when his cousin Yen (753-787; son of his uncle Han Yün-ch'ing) was killed by the Tibetans while accompanying a diplomatic mission sent to seek a peace treaty with them. Han Yen had passed the chin-shih examination in 783 and seemed to have a promising career ahead of him when he died, leaving a seventeen year old wife and a seven month old daughter. The mother and child were at first cared for by various relatives, but eventually became the responsibility of Han Yü, who in 800 arranged for the girl to marry Li Ao.<sup>18</sup> In a poem called "Signal Fires" Han Yü hinted that the empire could not long delay a solution to its border problems.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> HCLC, p. 97.

<sup>18</sup> See Li Ao's tomb inscription for his mother-in-law, Ch'üan T'ang-wen, vol. 13, ch. 639, pp. 17b-19a.

<sup>19</sup> HCLS, p. 3.

When he arrived in the capital Han Yü was impressed with the way the chin-shih candidates were honored by other people and decided to see how he could become one of them. He examined some of the compositions that had been written for the chin-shih examination and concluded that "it was possible to be without learning and yet to succeed" in the examinations.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, Han Yü was not a candidate for the examinations in 787.

Part of the reason for this may have been his straitened economic circumstances. In need of assistance, he used his relationship with his cousin Yen as an excuse to pay his respects to General Ma Sui (726-795), who had been highly honored for his part in putting down the recent rebellion. Ma Sui had been sent to Ho-yang in 775 to put down a mutiny among the troops there and may have become acquainted with the Han family then.<sup>21</sup> In 784 Ma had led troops against the rebel Li Huai-kuang in cooperation with Hun Chen (736-799), whose secretary (shu-chi) was Han Yen. It was probably the connection established at this time that brought Han Yü to Ma's door in 787. Ma had been a chief minister (tsai-hsianq) since 786, but suffered a loss of

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<sup>20</sup> HCLC, p. 97. A longer excerpt from this letter has been translated by Margaret Tudor South in Li Ho: A Scholar-official of the Yüan-ho Period (806-821) (Adelaide: Libraries Board of South Australia, 1967), p. 250.

<sup>21</sup> CTS 134, p. 3691.

prestige when his military power was taken away by Te-tsung in the sixth month of 787 because he had supported the peace talks with the Tibetans which had ended so disastrously when they broke the truce. Ma retained all of his non-military titles and his position as chief minister.<sup>22</sup>

Perhaps because Han Yen had so recently died in an affair for which he was partly responsible, Ma Sui gave Han Yü gifts of food and clothing and treated him very well.<sup>23</sup> This relationship continued until Ma's death in 795, and is reflected in a short essay by Han Yü which describes how the Ma family's cat nursed the kittens of another cat that had died and suggests that the cat had been influenced by its owner's virtuous behavior.<sup>24</sup>

He took the chin-shih examination for the first time in 788 and failed. He took it again in 789 and failed again. Both times the examiner was the same, and both times he had friends who passed. In 790 he returned to Hsüan-ch'eng to visit his family. On the way he stopped in Ho-chung (present Yung-chi hsien in Shansi) to pay his respects to Hun Chen, his cousin Yen's former superior, who was the military governor there. This may have been the first time he met Hun Chen, since despite his formal title

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<sup>22</sup> CTS 134, pp. 3697-3700.

<sup>23</sup> HCLC, p. 310.

<sup>24</sup> HCLC, p. 58. Cf. Spring, Tang Guwen, pp. 215-217.

of chief minister Hun had not been residing in Ch'ang-an. Han Yü wrote a poem for Hun with an introduction praising him, but was not able to duplicate the relationship he had established with Ma Sui.<sup>25</sup>

When he reached Cheng-chou, he took the time to write to Chia Tan, the military governor of Hua-chou, and sent samples of his writing, presumably hoping for a recommendation (which he apparently didn't get).<sup>26</sup>

In 791 Han Yü was back in Ch'ang-an for the examinations, but again he failed. It had now been five years since he first arrived in the capital, and he had still not accomplished his goal of winning an official position. His time had not been entirely wasted however, because he had made friends whose support would be important later on. He had also benefitted from the mental stimulation derived from contact with other bright young men with whom he could exchange ideas and literary techniques. Already at this time he was beginning to attract a circle of friends who admired his literary skill and his commitment to Confucian values.

It was perhaps at this time that he developed the literary theories for which he later became famous. As mentioned in the previous chapter, it was at this time

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<sup>25</sup> HCLC, p. 46.

<sup>26</sup> HCLC, pp. 383-384.

helpful for candidates for the examinations to attract the attention of prominent men, and one popular way of doing this was through one's literary compositions. We might also note that printing had not yet been invented and consequently such literature was normally circulated in manuscript form. There were many young men who hoped to use their literature to further their careers, so it was desirable that one's compositions should be distinctive in some way so that they might have a better chance of getting attention and being circulated. Han Yü certainly understood this, and he was fairly successful at producing compositions that stood out because of their unique qualities.

Han Yü wrote both poetry and prose, but his reputation derived primarily from his prose in the ku-wen style. While there is some doubt as to whether Han Yü ever actually studied with Liang Su, who was at that time the best known proponent of ku-wen, he certainly did associate with others who were advocates of ku-wen literature.

Han Yü himself ultimately became the most famous T'ang advocate of the "ancient style" in literature, and his views on literature and literary style have often been taken as a reflection of his conservative Confucian political views. While there is some truth in this interpretation, one should not exaggerate the conservatism of Han Yü's views on literature.

Perhaps the most frequently quoted statement of Han Yü's literary position comes from a letter he wrote in 801 in which he says, "In the beginning, I dared not read any book that was not of the Three Dynasties (Hsia, Shang, and Chou) or the Two (halves of the) Han; I dared not harbor any idea that was not of the sages."<sup>27</sup>

This quotation certainly seems to support Han Yü's conservative image. However, as Charles Hartman has pointed out, this statement must be reconciled with another in the same letter in which Han Yü expresses the desire to "expurgate all clichés."<sup>28</sup> Such a reconciliation is possible if one understands that it is not Han Yü's intent simply to mimic the style of the ancient writers, but to approach the act of writing in the same way that they did. He says as much in a letter written to a student in 812:

Someone asked me when writing whom is it best to take as a model. I must respectfully answer it is best to take the ancient sages and worthies as models. If one replies that in the extant writings of the sages, the language is not the same, so which is it best to take as a model, I must reply, take their idea as the model not their language.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> HCLC, p. 99; translation by Diana Mei, Han Yü as a Ku-wen Stylist (diss.), p. 36. Parentheses added.

<sup>28</sup> Hartman, Language and Allusion, p. 50.

<sup>29</sup> HCLC, p. 121; translation by Charles Hartman, "Han Yü and T. S. Eliot," Renditions (Autumn, 1977), p. 69.

Han Yü did, in fact, write in different styles on different occasions, and it seems that his opposition to parallel prose probably derived in large part from its use of a common style for all occasions, regardless of whether the style was really suited to the purpose of the text. Han Yü insisted not that a single style be adopted for all prose writing, but that the style should be appropriate for the purpose of the piece. This was what he admired in the prose style of the ancient authors of the Han and earlier periods. Those whom Han Yü considered the best writers of the Han dynasty--Ssu-ma Ch'ien (145-90 B.C.), Ssu-ma Hsiang-yu (179-117 B.C.), Liu Hsiang (79-8 B.C.), and Yang Hsiung (53 B.C.-18 A.D.)--all had distinctive writing styles of their own.

Han Yü appreciated writing which could be expressive while maintaining an economy of words. This is evident in the manner in which he praised the writing of the military governor Yü Ti in 806: "the language of your compositions is in accord with reality...They are rich, yet without one superfluous word; compact, yet do not omit one phrase. They are faithful to reality and logically tight."<sup>30</sup>

The desire for conciseness and an individual style sometimes led Han Yü to create literature that is difficult to read because of his use of unusual terms and grammatical

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<sup>30</sup> HCLC, p. 86. Translation by Hartman, "Han YÜ and T. S. Eliot," p. 66.



constructions. However, these pieces probably seem more difficult now than they did when Han Yü wrote them, because a modern reader does not approach them with the same vocabulary and cultural background that a T'ang reader would have had. It should also be noted that Han YÜ did not insist that literature must be difficult to be good. In the letter of 812 cited above, he says:

If one asks further if literature should be easy or difficult, I must reply that it is not a question of ease or difficulty, but simply of it being as it should be. You cannot definitely maintain it should be this way or prohibit it from being another way.<sup>31</sup>

At the opposite pole from the language of the classics, some of Han Yü's writing uses language from the colloquial speech of his time. As Charles Hartman has commented regarding Han YÜ's poetry, "Overemphasis on the difficult vocabulary of Han Yü's poetry and the 'strangeness' of his imagery has obscured the fact that Han Yü's basic poetic tone is conversational." Referring to the poems in which this conversational tone is prominent, Hartman considers that "such poetry is Han Yü's major accomplishment as a poet, that these poems provide the key link unifying his poetry and his prose, and that they were

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<sup>31</sup> HCLC, p. 86. Tr. Hartman, "Han Yü and T. S. Eliot," p. 66.

the major source of his reputation and influence on later, especially Sung, poets."<sup>32</sup>

While attempting to emulate the spirit of the ancient writers, Han Yü included in his own writing elements of both the ancient style and also of other, more recent, styles according to what seemed to him to be appropriate to each piece. There was, of course, a link between the literary style of the ancient writers that he admired and the Confucian ethical values associated with many of their writings. When he refers to the Way (tao) of these ancient writers, it is often unclear whether he means their ethical values or their literary style. It is possible that in many instances he might have had both meanings in mind, as may be the case in a piece written in 823 (again in Charles Hartman's translation):

When I write ku-wen I do not simply adopt rhythms that are different from the current style (i.e. p'ien-wen). That would be to think sentimentally about the ancients without understanding them. When one studies the tao of the ancients, it is necessary to penetrate at the same time their expressions. When penetrating their expressions, one's basic intent is on the tao of the ancients.<sup>33</sup>

Han Yü's literary reputation and the values he espoused in his literature may have been a factor in his eventual success in the examinations. Han Yü finally

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<sup>32</sup> "Han Yü and T. S. Eliot," p. 74.

<sup>33</sup> HCLC, p. 178. Tr. Hartman, "Han Yü and T. S. Eliot," p. 71.

received his chin-shih degree in 792 at the age of twenty-four on his fourth attempt. He was ranked fourteenth out of the thirty-three who passed in that year, twenty-three of whom are known by name. The chief examiner was Lu Chih, the former Han-lin academician who was now vice-minister of the Ministry of War (ping-pu shih-lang). In the fourth month of this year he was promoted to vice-director of the Secretariat (chung-shu shih-lang) and made a chief minister. He was assisted by Liang Su, who is usually given credit for passing Han Yü. Eight of those who passed subsequently became famous, so this was referred to as the "dragon and tiger list" (lung-hu pang).<sup>34</sup>

The exact nature of the relationship between Han Yü and Liang Su is uncertain. A story in the T'ang chih-yen (A Collection of Anecdotes from the T'ang, compiled c. 955) which purports to describe a meeting between them has been shown to be unhistorical by the modern historian Ch'ien Mu.<sup>35</sup> Han Yü's biography in the Chiu T'ang Shu says only

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<sup>34</sup> Hsü Sung, T'ang-k'o chi k'ao (A Study of Examination Records) (1838; Kyoto: Chubun shuppansha, 1982) 13, pp. 1a-4b; HTS 203, p.5787.

<sup>35</sup> Wang Ting-pao (chin-shih, 900), ed., T'ang chih-yen (Taipei: Shih-chieh shu-chü, 1975) 7, pp. 80-81; Ch'ien Mu, "Tsa-lun T'ang-tai ku-wen yün-tung (Miscellaneous Discussions regarding the T'ang ku-wen Movement)," Hsin-ya hsüeh-pao vol. 3, no. 1 (1957), reprinted in Lo Lien-t'ien, ed., Chung-kuo wen-hsüeh shih lun-wen hsüan-chi (An Anthology of Articles on the History of Chinese Literature) (Taipei: Hsüeh-sheng shu-chü, 1979) vol. 3. p. 1002.

that he associated with the followers of Liang Su and Tu-ku Chi.<sup>36</sup> In a letter written years later, Han Yü mentions Liang's role in recommending eight candidates to Lu Chih but does not say that he knew Liang previously.<sup>37</sup> It is possible that there was no direct connection between them, only a common interest in Confucianism and literary reform which they shared with a number of mutual acquaintances. As Pulleyblank has pointed out, Lu Chih was not a part of the ku-wen movement (he wrote his Confucian essays in elegant parallel prose), but he did share their commitment to Confucian values.<sup>38</sup> This may be sufficient to account for Han Yü's success.

The satisfaction that Han Yü must have felt as a result of finally passing the examination was limited by the knowledge that he still had not been offered an official position. For this it was necessary to take the placement examination conducted by the Board of Personnel.

Han Yü had definite ideas about how officials ought to behave and he disapproved of any who tried to shirk their responsibility. In an essay "On the Remonstrating Minister" (Cheng-ch'en lun), he satirized Yang Ch'eng who had been a

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36 CTS 160, p. 4195.

37 HCLC, p. 117.

38 Pulleyblank, "Neo-Confucianism and Neo-Legalism," p. 94.

remonstrating official for five years without ever offering any remonstrance. This was the same Yang Ch'eng who was supposedly the veiled object of Han Yü's admiration in the poem he wrote on the way to the capital in 786. Yang later redeemed himself somewhat by defending Lu Chih against false accusations in 795 and Han Yü's essay has been credited with stimulating him to action, but since three years had passed in the meantime this is unlikely.<sup>39</sup>

In 793 Han Yü took the po-hsüeh hung-tz'u (erudite literatus) examination but failed to get an appointment. In a letter to a friend employed in the Bureau of Forestry and Crafts (yü-pu) he complains that he passed the Ministry of Personnel examination, but was eliminated by the Secretariat, and speculates that it is because they haven't heard of him, so he asks for a recommendation.<sup>40</sup> There is no record of who it was at the Secretariat who rejected him or why. Lo Lien-t'ien guesses that it was either Chao Ching (737-797) or Chia Tan, both of whom were chief ministers in 793. If he is correct, Chao Ching would seem to be the more likely candidate because he was one of the two vice-directors of the Secretariat (the other was Lu Chih), while Chia Tan was vice-director of the right (yu-p'u-yeh) of the

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<sup>39</sup> HCLC, pp. 62-65; CTS 192, pp. 5132-5134.

<sup>40</sup> HCLC, pp. 384-386.

Department of State Affairs, but this still does not explain why Han Yü was rejected.<sup>41</sup>

His economic situation was not much improved, but in a poem written for his friend Meng Chiao (751-814) he made a virtue of poverty through an implied identification of sageliness with humble circumstances and foolishness with wealth and the pursuit of pleasure.<sup>42</sup> It was perhaps in this year that Han Yü took a trip to Feng-hsiang (west of Ch'ang-an) in the sixth month seeking employment with the military governor Hsing Chün-ya.<sup>43</sup>

It was at this time too that he expressed in writing for the first time his concern over the dangers of the pursuit of immortality via the arts of Taoist alchemy. He wrote a poem in the style of the popular "tale of marvels" (ch'uan-ch'i) describing the sad fate of a young girl whose curiosity about the occult cost her her life. Referring to those who seek contact with supernatural beings, he asks (in Stephen Owen's translation), "How can they not trust in themselves/ But instead wish to stray seeking strange

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<sup>41</sup> HYYC, pp. 43-44; Chou Tao-chi, Han-T'ang tsai-hsiang chih-tu (The Chief Minister System from the Han to the T'ang) (1964; Taipei: Ta-hua shu-chü, 1978), supplement, pp. 92-93.

<sup>42</sup> HCLS, p. 5; Owen, Meng Chiao and Han Yü, pp. 41-42 (all references to this work are to the published book, not the dissertation). Cf. also the conclusion of the poem "The Far North" (Pei-chi) in HCLS, p. 4 and Owen, p. 83.

<sup>43</sup> HCLC, pp. 118-119; HYYC, p. 44.

beings?"<sup>44</sup> The sentiments expressed in this poem will appear again in his famous essay on the Buddha's bone written in 819.

He took the po-hsüeh hung-tz'u examination for the second time in 794 and failed again. The examination included a discussion (yi) on the topic of students from the National University (t'ai-hsüeh) substituting for the officials in charge of ritual preparations (Hsüeh-sheng tai chai-lang). Han Yü's opinion conflicted with that of the court on this matter, and Lo suspects that this may account for his failure at this time.<sup>45</sup>

Han Hui's widow died in this year at Hsüan-ch'eng and Lao-ch'eng returned her body to Ho-yang for burial. Han Yü had also returned to Ho-yang to visit the family graves (perhaps at the Ch'ing-ming festival in the third month), and met him there. In the sacrificial prayer that he wrote on this occasion Han Yü remembered how she had cared for him.<sup>46</sup>

He failed the po-hsüeh hung-tz'u examination for the third time in 795. His friend Ts'ui Li-chih, who had obtained his chin-shih degree in 788 and passed the po-

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<sup>44</sup> HCLS, pp. 14-17; tr. Owen, pp. 43-44.

<sup>45</sup> HCLC, pp. 67-68; HYYC, p. 45.

<sup>46</sup> HCLC, pp. 194-195. She is also mentioned in his sacrificial prayer for Lao-ch'eng, HCLC, p. 196.

hsüeh hung-tz'u examination in 790, wrote to encourage him. In his reply Han Yü says that when he was first rejected (in 793) he felt embarrassed and doubted his own worthiness, but after his second rejection he obtained copies of the successful examination answers and found that they were no better than his. He therefore wonders about the standards presently being applied in these examinations and suggests that such ancient masters as Ch'ü Yüan (343?-278? B.C.), Meng K'o (Mencius, 372-279 B.C.), Sau-ma Ch'ien, Sau-ma Hsiang-yu, and Yang Hsiung would not be able to pass either.<sup>47</sup>

On the twenty-seventh day of the first month he submitted the first of three letters to the chief ministers describing his situation and asking for their assistance. The dominant chief minister at this time was Chao Ching (736-796), but it is possible that Han Yü's letter was intended for Lu Mai (739-798) who had just replaced Lu Chih as vice-director of the Secretariat. In the letter Han Yü describes himself as presenting it at the gate which led to the entrance of the Secretariat, whereas Chao Ching was at this time vice-director of the Chancellery (men-hsia shih-lang). Moreover, Chao had been at odds with Lu Chih and might not have been sympathetic toward a chin-shih who had

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<sup>47</sup> HCLC, p. 97; tr. South, Li Ho, pp. 250-251; HYYC, p. 45.



been passed by him, so Han Yü may have felt that he would do better to present his case to Lu Mai.<sup>48</sup>

He quotes the Book of Odes (Shih-ching), Mencius, and the Book of Documents (Shu-ching) in support of the proposition that it is part of the duty of a Confucian statesman to seek out and employ men of talent. He states that he is twenty-eight years (sui) old, and that he belongs to the class of Gentlemen (shih). He has devoted himself to studying the way of the sages without any ulterior motive, and no unorthodox ideas have entered his mind. He admits that sometimes he allows his emotions to affect his writings and that he has used the unusual to make himself known, but he has not contradicted the teachings of the sages or written anything improper. He describes his experience with the examinations and states that he would be satisfied with even a low office with a small salary. In economic distress and without recognition, he is tempted to abandon his ambition, but still feels that he has something to offer if only he were given a chance. He has studied the way of the sages in order to cultivate himself for twenty years now, since the age of seven (sui), and it would be contrary to the way of the gentlemen of ancient times if he did not

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<sup>48</sup> HCLC, p. 89; CTS 136, p. 3754; HTS 62, p. 1706. Chao's biographies are in CTS 138, pp. 3775-3780; and HTS 150, pp. 4807-4809. Lu's biographies are in CTS 135, pp. 3753-3754; and HTS 150, pp. 4815-4816.

offer his services to his lord. The way of the rulers of ancient times was to employ men according to their ability and their virtue, not rejecting them even though they recommended themselves. Han Yü respectfully reflects that there are now humane persons in the highest positions and if he were to depart without first attempting to contact them, it would be like abandoning oneself and not serving one's chief minister in the manner of the gentlemen (chün-tzu) of ancient times. Now if it were known that one had written to the chief ministers seeking employment, and that the chief ministers had not felt insulted but had recommended him to the emperor and conferred a noble rank on him, then capable gentlemen who have been living in obscurity would certainly come to offer their services to the court.<sup>49</sup>

Receiving no reply, Han Yü sent a second letter nineteen days later on the seventeenth day of the second month. In this letter, he says that he has heard that one who is endangered by fire or water and who calls out for help does not expect that his plea will be heard and answered only by his relatives who care for him, but that anyone in the vicinity, even though they may bear a grudge against him, as long as their enmity does not extend to wishing his death, will hear his cry and treat him humanely. He compares his situation to this and suggests that a humane

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<sup>49</sup> HCLC, pp. 89-92.

man such as he presumes the chief minister to be would similarly take pity on him. Someone has suggested to him that perhaps the chief ministers do know about him, but that the times are not right for them to employ him. He rejects this argument, saying that if his ability is inadequate to make him worthy of the chief ministers' recommendation that is one thing, but the times are what men such as the chief ministers make of them; they are not beyond human control (literally, they are not made by Heaven). He points out that only five or six years earlier a chief minister (Li Pi) had recommended a commoner (Yang Ch'eng) for an official position, and asks how that time differs from the present. Furthermore, nowadays military and civil governors and even some lower ranking officials can recommend their own subordinates, disregarding whether the nominee is already in government service or not. How could it be then that those in such an honorable position as the chief ministers should say that they cannot do so? He then cites the ancient examples of Kuan Chung choosing two men from a group of thieves to be officials<sup>50</sup> and Chao Wen-tzu of Chin advancing seventy men to positions in the state granary,<sup>51</sup> and

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<sup>50</sup> The story is from the Li chi (Book of Rites). It has been translated by James Legge in "The Sacred Books of the East," vols. XXVII and XXVIII (Oxford University Press, 1885; reprint New York: University Books, 1967), vol. 2, p. 168.

<sup>51</sup> Legge, Li chi, vol. 1, p. 200.

suggests that commoners of the present time, although of humble status, may be compared to these. He refers again to his own predicament, saying that he does not know what to do and only hopes for a little pity.<sup>52</sup>

As he received no reply to this letter either, Han Yü submitted a third letter twenty-nine days later, on the sixteenth day of the third month. This time he drew on the example of the Duke of Chou, the prototype of the ideal Confucian minister. Han Yü describes in detail how conscientiously the Duke sought out worthy men to serve the state, even in the best of times when the state was already well administered. Can it be that conditions now are as perfect as they were in the age of the Duke of Chou and can it be that all the worthy men in the empire have already been recommended? Is it not possible that those who come seeking an audience might have something worthwhile to offer and that the chief ministers should at least hear what they have to say? Han Yü has already sent two letters and approached the chief minister's gate three times, only to be turned away by the gatekeeper each time. In ancient times a gentleman who could not find employment in his native state could offer his services to the ruler of another state, but now the empire is united under one ruler and this is no longer possible. Consequently, for gentlemen who practice

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<sup>52</sup> HCLC, pp. 92-93.

the Way, if they cannot find employment at court then the only alternative is to become recluses in the mountains and forests, but this is something that one who cares about his country cannot bear to do. This is why Han Yü has so shamelessly and persistently presented his case. He hopes that the chief ministers will give some consideration to what he has said.<sup>53</sup>

Han Yü has been criticized for writing these letters, but as the modern critic Lin Shu has pointed out, the practice of writing letters to recommend oneself goes back as far as the period of the Warring States (403-221 B.C.).<sup>54</sup> It should also be remembered that since the death of his sister-in-law in the previous year Han Yü now bore the full responsibility for the welfare of his extended family. He thus found himself in a dilemma common to Confucian office-seekers in traditional China. The same Confucian value system that told him to preserve his dignity and stick to his principles in time of adversity also required that he provide for his family and apply his abilities on behalf of his fellow men. The only way he could do this properly was to enter government service, and

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<sup>53</sup> HCLC, pp. 94-95. There is a complete translation of this letter in Spring, Tang Guwen, pp. 102-106.

<sup>54</sup> Lin Shu, Han-Liu wen yen-chiu fa (How to Study the Literature of Han Yü and Liu Tsung-yüan) (Taipei: Kuang-wen shu-chü, 1976), pp. 14-15.

this might only be possible by compromising some of the values that made him desire such service in the first place.

Han Yü's frustration is apparent not only in these letters, but also in essays such as the one in which he praises an ancient expert on horses named Po-lo. The essay opens with the words, "Only when there is a Po-lo can there then be thousand-li horses." (A li is one-third of an English mile) Han Yü then goes on to explain that horses able to run for such a long distance are not really uncommon, but only an expert like Po-lo can distinguish them from ordinary horses and give them the care and training they need to realize their potential. If such a horse's special qualities are not recognized, it may appear less capable than an ordinary horse. Then a man who lacks Po-lo's good judgement may look at a horse and say, "There are no (good) horses in the world." To this Han Yü replies, "Are there really no (good) horses? (This man) really does not know horses." The parallel with Han Yü's own situation is too obvious to miss. Han Yü, too, like the "thousand-li horse," has the potential for exceptional performance if only someone in authority could recognize his ability.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> HCLC, p. 20. There is a complete translation of this piece in Liu, Chinese Classical Prose, p. 29. It is also translated, along with its three companion pieces, in Friedrich A. Bischoff, Interpreting the Fu (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1976), p. 410; and Spring, Tang quwen, pp. 136-137.

Having received no reply to his third letter, he left Ch'ang-an on the second day of the fifth month to return to his home in the east.

Going out through the T'ung pass five days later, he had stopped to rest on the shady side of the river when he saw a procession going in the opposite direction carrying two caged birds, an albino crow and a white mynah, as tribute for the emperor. This made him all the more discouraged and he wrote a prose poem (fu) to express his sorrow that these two ignorant birds with only the color of their feathers to recommend them would get to see the emperor while he couldn't despite all his years of study and self-cultivation.<sup>56</sup> This was even more affecting because the two birds were being sent from the military governor of Han Yü's own home prefecture of Ho-yang.<sup>57</sup>

Han Yü reached Ho-yang in the fifth or sixth month of 795. In the ninth month he went to Lo-yang, stopping on the way to sacrifice at the grave of T'ien Heng (d. c. 202 B.C.),<sup>58</sup> who attracted many worthy men from Ch'i to follow him in committing suicide rather than surrender to the

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<sup>56</sup> HCLC, pp. 1-2.

<sup>57</sup> CTS 13, p. 382.

<sup>58</sup> Ssu-ma Ch'ien, Shih-chi (Historical Records) (c. 90 B.C.; Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1959), ch. 94; tr. by Burton Watson, Records of the Grand Historian of China, 2 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), vol. 1, pp. 245-251.

founder of the Han dynasty. Han Yü admired the righteous character which had enabled T'ien Heng to attract such devoted followers, and so wrote a sacrificial prayer and offered a libation for him.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> HCLC, pp. 175-176.



## LIFE IN THE PROVINCES: 796 TO 806

Han Yü's life entered a new phase in the summer of 796. In the third month of that year the former chief minister Tung Chin (724-799)<sup>1</sup> had been transferred from the position of Minister of War in Ch'ang-an to Acting Governor (liu-shou) of Lo-yang. In the seventh month he was appointed prefect of Pien-chou (present K'ai-feng) and commander of the Hsüan-wu Army to replace its former military governor who had just died. To give him added status he was also granted the honorary titles of chief minister and vice-director of the left of the Department of State Affairs. To avoid delay he recruited a personal staff locally in Lo-yang to accompany him to his new post. This was the sort of informal recruitment outside the normal civil service system that Han Yü had referred to in his third letter to the chief ministers, and it was the way that he got his first job, as he was among those hired by Tung Chin.

As soon as he had assembled his staff, Tung Chin hastened to Pien-chou to forestall a budding revolt led by

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<sup>1</sup> Biographies in CTS 145, pp. 3934-3938; HTS 151, pp. 4819-4821. "Account of Conduct" in HCLC, pp. 331-336.

the officer who had assumed command of the local troops after the death of the military governor. Tung succeeded in restoring order despite lacking the support of a large military force of his own.<sup>2</sup>

As a member of Tung's staff, Han Yü received his first official titles. He was granted the title of provincial judge (kuan-ch'a t'ui-kuan) and given the rank of a probationary editing clerk in the imperial library (shih pi-shu-sheng chiao-shu). It is not clear whether he actually had any judicial duties or whether he simply served as a general aide to Tung Chin.

In the eighth month the court sent four officials to assist Tung in various capacities, most of whom seem to have been demoted from higher positions. Some of them seem to have brought with them an air of superiority that made them unpopular with the army and ultimately led to tragic consequences.

A more auspicious arrival was that of Li Ao (772- c. 838) from Hsü-chou. Han Yü soon found that he and Li Ao had much in common, especially in their views of Confucianism and its relation to current social problems. They became

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<sup>2</sup> HCLC, pp. 334-335.

lifelong friends and are often cited jointly as precursors of the Neo-Confucianism of the Sung.<sup>3</sup>

An event which occurred in 797 became a source of controversy among later historians who accused Han Yü of failing to adhere to his own political standards. He wrote a poem<sup>4</sup> with a preface<sup>5</sup> praising the eunuch army supervisor Chü Wen-chen.<sup>6</sup> This drew criticism from the Ch'ing historian Wang Ming-sheng (1722-1798) who claimed that the misfortunes of eunuch control of the military began with Chü.<sup>7</sup> Ch'en Yin-k'ö also takes this as evidence of Han Yü's sympathy for Chü, which he believes colored Han's account of Chü in the Shun-tsung shih-lu.<sup>8</sup>

Lo Lien-t'ien notes, however, that the preface itself says that Tung Chin ordered his subordinates to compose poems in praise of Chü at a party to mark Chü's return to the capital, so Han Yü's words do not necessarily

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<sup>3</sup> On the relationship between Han Yü and Li Ao, see Barrett, Li Ao, pp. 182-196.

<sup>4</sup> HCLS, pp. 21-22.

<sup>5</sup> HCLC, pp. 391-392.

<sup>6</sup> Biography in HTS 207, pp. 5868-5869, under the name, Liu Chen-liang.

<sup>7</sup> Cited in HYYC, p. 52.

<sup>8</sup> Ch'en Yin-k'ö, T'ang-tai cheng-chih shih, p. 96. Of course, this argument holds only if one accepts that the current version of the Shun-tsung shih-lu is the one that Han Yü wrote.

reflect his true feelings. Lo speculates that if Han Yü really was sympathetic to this eunuch it could have been because the eunuch had accompanied the ill-fated peace mission during which Han Yü's cousin Han Yen had been killed in 787. Chü had himself been captured and later released. Han Yü may therefore have felt a certain obligation to respect a colleague of his late cousin. Lo also notes that Wang Ming-sheng acknowledges that Chü's bad qualities had not yet been revealed at this time.<sup>9</sup>

Sometime during 797 Han Yü was joined at Pien-chou by his friend Meng Chiao who had received his chin-shih degree the previous year. Meng's patron was not Tung Chin but Lu Ch'ang-yüan, one of the four officials sent by the court to assist Tung. Meng Chiao told Han Yü about a talented scholar named Chang Chi who subsequently arrived from Ho-chou (in present Anwhei) in the tenth month to study with Han Yü.<sup>10</sup>

Li Ao left for the capital in 798 to take the chin-shih examination (which he passed), while Han Yü was put in charge of administering the prefectural qualifying examination at Pien-chou which was a prerequisite for those who wished to take the chin-shih examination in the capital.

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<sup>9</sup> HYYC, pp. 52-53.

<sup>10</sup> On Chang Chi, see Lo Lien-t'ien, "Chang Chi nien-p'ü (A Chronological Biography of Chang Chi)," Ta-lu tsa-chih, vol. 25, nos. 4, 5, 6 (1962), pp. 110-115, 145-152, 182-191.

Among those who passed was Chang Chi who went on to obtain his chin-shih degree in the capital the next year.<sup>11</sup> The friendships Han Yü formed with Meng Chiao, Li Ao and Chang Chi was significant for, as Stephen Owen has said, "These four men...formed the nucleus of a group of scholars and poets who dominated the intellectual literary world for the next three decades."<sup>12</sup>

Of these four, it was Chang Chi rather than Han Yü who best fit the image of a sober, serious Confucian. Chang Chi even wrote a letter to Han Yü chiding him for failing to preserve a serious demeanor at all times. His criticisms provide a rare glimpse into Han Yü's behavior when he was relaxed and in the company of friends. The following excerpt is from James R. Hightower's translation:

However, anyone who wishes to promote the Way of the Sages should follow it himself. Now I have recently observed that you are given to incongruous, baseless talk, and you get people to talk that way in your presence for fun. This is not without damage to your moral stature.

Further, in arguments with others you do not always make allowance for the weakness of others, as though you were interested only in scoring a point. This too is not without damage. The Former Kings kept the Six Classics as a constant guide. If a man of virtue does not do as much, he is diminished; how much the worse to play at gambling and squabble with others for money? The gentleman assuredly does not do it, but now you are doing it, wasting your time. I truly do not understand why you do it.

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<sup>11</sup> Han Yü's questions are in HCLC, pp. 58-62, but the commentary notes that not all are from the same year.

<sup>12</sup> Owen, Meng Chiao and Han Yü, p. 48.

Your discussions and writings are not false to the standards of the ancients, but sometimes your conduct does not accord with traditional standards, and of this I cannot approve. I hope you will give up your taste for gambling and renounce idle talk.<sup>13</sup>

Han Yü does not deny these charges, but argues that these are not serious vices. As for his making "baseless, incongruous remarks" in the company of friends, "I just do it for fun; it's not as bad as wine and women, is it?" Regarding Chang Chi's other criticisms, "I must admit that I do not control myself in an argument and I should watch out and reform. As for gambling, I venture not to accept your advice." Han Yü also resisted Chang Chi's suggestion that he should do less talking about his Confucian principles and instead devote himself to writing a book. To this Han Yü replied, "For transforming the present generation, there is nothing better than speech; for transmitting (moral principles) to future generations, there is nothing better than books." For the present, Han Yü felt it more appropriate to use oral persuasion to try to change the views of the present generation.<sup>14</sup>

It is interesting that Han Yü, who is known as a Confucian moralist, is here being lectured about moral

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<sup>13</sup> Chang Chi's letter is quoted in HCLC, p. 76; the translation is from James R. Hightower, "Han Yü as Humorist," Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies, vol. 44, no. 1 (June, 1984), p. 6.

<sup>14</sup> HCLC, p. 77; tr. Hightower, "Han Yü as Humorist," pp. 7-8.

behavior. Chang Chi is concerned about Han Yü's private behavior, while Han Yü himself is typically more concerned about public behavior that directly affects other people. Han Yü sees nothing wrong in the fact that he enjoys hearing a good story or a clever remark.

On occasion, he even indulged in a bit of whimsical writing himself. An example is his "Biography of Mao Ying," in which he recounts the life history of a writing brush in the style of a biography in one of the standard Chinese dynastic histories. Some modern scholars have even suggested on the basis of such pieces that Han Yü contributed to the development of Chinese fiction.<sup>15</sup> It is doubtful that Han Yü really had any significant influence on writers of fiction, but he did have a good narrative style and a strong sense of the dramatic. In different circumstances it is conceivable that he might have become a successful fiction writer. If this seems unlikely for an author with a conservative image, we need only remind ourselves that one of the most articulate spokesman for

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. Y. W. Ma, "Prose Writings of Han Yü and Ch'uan-ch'i Literature," Journal of Oriental Studies, vol. 7, no. 2 (July, 1969), pp. 195-223, and the sources cited therein. For translations of the Mao Ying chuan, see William H. Nienhauser, Jr., "An Allegorical Reading of Han Yü's 'Mao - Ying Chuan' (Biography of Fur Point)," Oriens Extremus, vol. 23, no. 2 (Dec., 1976), pp. 153-174; and Hightower, "Han Yü as Humorist," pp. 10-14.

conservatism in our own time, William F. Buckley, Jr., has now become a successful author of adventure novels.

It was probably in 797 or 798 that Han Yü finally felt financially secure enough to marry. No date for his marriage has been preserved, but it could have been no later than 798 because he already had a daughter in the spring of 799. His wife's personal name is not known, but she was a Lu of Fan-yang and therefore, like Han Hui's wife, a member of one of the great lineages. The fact that both Han Yü and Han Hui were able to obtain wives from the most prestigious lineages of the T'ang confirms their status as members of the social elite. Han Yü's father-in-law, Lu Yi, was a prefectural official of Honan prefecture who was noted for his virtuous conduct, while his mother-in-law was the niece of Miao Chin-ch'ing who held the high honorary rank of Grand Preceptor (t'ai-shih).<sup>16</sup>

Han Yü's nephew Lao-ch'eng came to visit him at Pien-chou and it seems likely that it was also during this period that Han Yen's widow and daughter came to live with him. Lao-ch'eng stayed for a year then asked to return to the south to get his family. Before he could get back to Pien-chou Han Yü had gone. They never saw each other again.

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<sup>16</sup> HCLC, pp. 316-317, and 318-319, tomb inscriptions written by Han Yü for his wife's mother and older brother.



Tung Chin died on the third day of the second month of 799. Fearing that there would be trouble after his death, he had ordered his sons to gather together and leave the city quickly. His temporary successor was Lu Ch'ang-yüan, Meng Chiao's patron (although Meng had already left Pien-chou earlier) and one of the four officials sent by the court. Lu tried to restrain the unruly Hsüan-wu Army with strict rules, but the soldiers would not obey and instead rebelled, killing him and other officials.

Han Yü was not caught up in this rebellion because he was no longer in Pien-chou when it broke out. He had, in accordance with custom, followed Tung Chin's funeral procession back to Lo-yang. His family had been left behind in Pien-chou and when he heard about the rebellion he became quite concerned for their safety. He was relieved to receive a report that they had escaped harm and were on their way to the south by boat via the Pien River. He turned around as soon as he could and made his way to the south to join them. His dismay at the recent events in Pien-chou and his frustration at the court's seeming unwillingness to use force against such rebellious troops was expressed in two short poems, while a much longer poem addressed to Chang Chi describes his personal experiences and his feelings from the time of Tung Chin's death until

his arrival in the south, including a poetic description of the route he took to get there.<sup>17</sup>

Han Yü and his family finally found a temporary home at Fu-li in Hsü-chou (present Su-hsien in Anhwei). He obtained his new residence there through the good offices of Chang Chien-feng (735-800), an official with long years of experience in provincial posts who had been prefect and military governor at Hsü-chou since 788. Chang and Han Yü had met earlier, probably through Han's former patron in Ch'ang-an, Ma Sui, who had recruited Chang to serve under him as an administrative assistant (p'an-kuan) while Ma was stationed at Han Yü's home prefecture of Ho-yang and who had more than once recommended Chang to the court. Besides this connection to both Ma Sui and Ho-yang, Chang was fond of literature and was known for his ceremonious treatment of worthy gentlemen of low rank.<sup>18</sup>

Although Han Yü had a place to live, he still did not have a job and in the poem to Chang Chi referred to above he refers to his family as a "hundred mouths." While this does not mean that there were literally one hundred persons with him, it does seem likely that he was now

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<sup>17</sup> HCLS, pp. 35-36, 40-47; all tr. by Owen, Meng Chiao and Han Yü, pp. 50-51, 74-78.

<sup>18</sup> Chang's biographies are in CTS 140, pp. 3828-3832; HTS 158, pp. 4939-4941. See also Han Yü's letter to Meng Chiao in HCLC, pp. 79-80.

accompanied by all those relatives and family servants who had formerly lived in Hsüan-ch'eng as dependents of Han Hui's widow. Another poem written while he was living at Fu-li mentions that he had asked for a recommendation for appointment as a censor.<sup>19</sup> By autumn he was about to depart to seek employment elsewhere when he was hired by Chang Chien-feng as a provincial judge, the same rank he had held in Pien-chou.<sup>20</sup>

Life as a member of Chang's staff was not easy, however. On the first day of the ninth month Han Yü sent a letter to Chang protesting a rule that from the ninth month to the end of the second month officials must remain on duty continuously from morning until night unless they were ill or had to go out on official business.<sup>21</sup> Lo Lien-t'ien explains that normally such officials would have been expected to go on duty from 3 a.m. until 9 a.m., and again from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. for a total of ten hours, but if they were not allowed to leave between these times, then their workday would effectively amount to sixteen hours.<sup>22</sup> There is no record of Chang's reply.

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<sup>19</sup> HCLS, pp. 48-49.

<sup>20</sup> HCLC, p. 80; Li Ao, hsing-chuang, p. 22b.

<sup>21</sup> HCLC, pp. 105-106.

<sup>22</sup> HYYC, p. 56.

Han Yü and Chang Chien-feng shared a common interest in literature and Han Yü wrote an essay in which he praised Chang's writing, which was well known at the time,<sup>23</sup> but their personalities seem to have been basically incompatible. Chang enjoyed playing a form of polo which was used by soldiers as a sort of military training as well as a game, but Han Yü disapproved of the governor's personal participation in the sport. He wrote both a poem<sup>24</sup> and a letter<sup>25</sup> warning Chang that he was endangering his life (he was then sixty-four) when he would do better to sit calmly and think about ways to deal with contemporary problems.

It was customary for military governors to send envoys to deliver their greetings to the court at the new year, and Han Yü was chosen to go on behalf of Chang Chien-feng.<sup>26</sup> It is quite possible that Chang looked forward to the prospect of having him out of the way for a while.

On his return from the capital Han Yü wrote a poem expressing his belief that the current troubles besetting the empire were due to the failure of the emperor's officials to give him good advice, and noting with regret that although he had been courteously treated in the

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<sup>23</sup> HCLC, pp. 59-60.

<sup>24</sup> HCLS, pp. 49-51; tr. by Owen, pp. 87-88.

<sup>25</sup> HCLC, p. 114.

<sup>26</sup> HCLC, pp. 176-178.

capital, he had not had the opportunity to offer his own advice. His feelings of disappointment at his failure to make his ideas known to the emperor were compounded by the fact that he had to return to Hsü-chou in the company of soldiers who symbolized the troubled state of the empire.<sup>27</sup>

Back in Hsü-chou Han Yü continued to offer his opinions in a very direct manner that displeased the governor. In the fifth month Chang dismissed him and he left Hsü-chou. Chang died on the thirteenth day of that month, but Han Yü apparently wrote nothing in his memory and Lo interprets this as an indication that there were still hard feelings between them at the time of Chang's death.<sup>28</sup> This may be true, but it was fortunate for Han Yü that he left when he did, for Chang's death was followed by a military conflict such as had occurred at Pien-chou after Tung Chin's death.<sup>29</sup>

He returned to Lo-yang, taking the time to visit friends and see famous places along the way.<sup>30</sup> He stayed in Lo-yang for the remainder of the year 800, and in the winter went to Ch'ang-an for the placement examination, returning to Lo-yang in the third month. He remained without a job

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<sup>27</sup> HCLS, pp. 57-58; tr. by Owen, pp. 80-81.

<sup>28</sup> HYYC, p. 57.

<sup>29</sup> TCTC 235, pp. 7588-7589.

<sup>30</sup> HCLC, p. 398.

for most of the year 801, and then in the fall or early winter he received an appointment as a professor (po-shih) at the school of the Four Gates, a division of the National University that accepted students who were the sons of officials of the seventh rank or higher. Han Yü hurried to Ch'ang-an to accept the position.

A teacher's status was influenced by his students' success (or lack of it) in the examinations and Han Yü's reputation was enhanced by the results of the chin-shih examination of 802. He recommended ten candidates to Lu Ts'an of the Ministry of Sacrifices (tz'u-pu) who was assisting the chief examiner Ch'uan Te-yü in supervising the examinations. Four of the ten passed in 802 and all of the rest in subsequent years.<sup>31</sup> As a result of this group's success many other candidates thereafter came to seek Han Yü's recommendation and called themselves his "disciples" (men ti-tzu).

Despite the success of his students, Han Yü remained dissatisfied with the way that teachers were treated in T'ang society. He expressed this dissatisfaction in an essay "On Teachers" (shih-shuo) written for one of his students, in which he expressed his educational ideals. Han Yü argues that since men are not born with knowledge, they

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<sup>31</sup> HCLC, pp. 116-118; Hsü Sung, T'ang-k'ao chi k'ao, ch. 15, p. 12b.

all need teachers. The principle qualification for a teacher should be knowledge of the Way. It should make no difference whether the teacher is older or younger than the student, nor whether he is of higher or lower social status. Even the ancient sages with all their wisdom still sought teachers, yet today men are ashamed to study with teachers.

A man will choose a teacher for his son to teach the boy reading and punctuation, but will not study with a teacher himself to resolve his doubts concerning the Way. Persons seeking technical skills such as musicians and craftsmen are not ashamed to study with teachers, but gentlemen laugh at those among them who would be teachers or students. They assume that men of the same age must have an equal understanding of the Way. They are ashamed to study with anyone whose social status is lower than their own, and think that anyone who studies with a teacher of high status does so only to curry favor. They consider themselves superior to those with only technical skills, yet they cannot equal such persons in knowledge. Confucius himself expressed his willingness to learn from others, even though they were less wise than he. The relationship between teacher and student need not necessarily be that of superior and inferior in a general sense. The teacher is simply one

who has learned the Way first and who knows how to transmit what he has learned.<sup>32</sup>

This essay expresses so well the Chinese ideal of what education ought to be that it became required reading for Chinese students up to the twentieth century. It has been translated into English several times (that is why it is only summarized here).<sup>33</sup>

Some time in the spring or summer of 802 Han Yü received permission to return to Lo-yang to get his wife. On the way he stopped at Hua-shan to see the sights and climbed the Chüeh peak, where, according to a story in the T'ang kuo shih pu (Supplement to the National History of the T'ang), he was afraid to come down and had even written a note of farewell to his family before the local magistrate finally coaxed him down.<sup>34</sup> The accuracy of this story had been disputed since the Sung.<sup>35</sup> There is no doubt that Han Yü did climb Hua-shan, for he refers to it in a poem written

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<sup>32</sup> HCLC, pp. 24-25.

<sup>33</sup> Translations may be found in William Theodore de Bary, et al., eds., Sources of Chinese Tradition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), pp. 429-430; Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang, "Prose Writings of Han Yü," Chinese Literature, (1959, no. 2) pp. 64-65; Liu, Chinese Classical Prose, pp. 35-37; Spring, Tang Guwen, pp. 353-361.

<sup>34</sup> Li Chao (fl. c. 820), ed., T'ang kuo shih pu (c. 825; Taipei: Shih-chieh shu-chü, 1978), p. 38.

<sup>35</sup> See the discussion and quotations cited in HYYC, pp. 59-60.



in 806,<sup>36</sup> but since the origin of the story is not known, there is no way to be sure whether it is entirely true or whether it has been "improved" by an imaginative storyteller.

It seems that Han Yü temporarily lost his position at the National University because in a letter he refers to himself as a "former" (ch'ien) professor. The letter has been dated by internal evidence to the fourth month of 803. It is addressed to the newly-appointed metropolitan governor (ching-chao yin) Li Shih (fl. c. 800).<sup>37</sup> This letter is controversial because Han Yü praises Li as a loyal and conscientious minister before offering two scrolls containing fifteen pieces of his writing in the hope of getting a recommendation, whereas in the Shun-tsung shih-lu, which is attributed to Han Yü, Li is strongly criticized for presuming on his position as one of the emperor's favorites to treat the people badly and ignore their distress.<sup>38</sup>

Lo Lien-t'ien notes that Li had just assumed his post as mayor and had not yet manifested his evil character and since he had the emperor's confidence he was very

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<sup>36</sup> HCLS, pp. 180-185, written in 806.

<sup>37</sup> Biographies in CTS 135, pp. 3730-3732; HTS 167, p. 5112.

<sup>38</sup> Han Yü's letter to Li Shih is in HCLC, pp. 81-82; the relevant portion of the Shun-tsung shih-lu is in HCLC, pp. 406-407.

powerful, therefore highly desirable as a sponsor. The texts critical of Li were written later, after his bad behavior had become well known.<sup>39</sup> E. G. Pulleyblank adds the possibility that the present version of the Shun-tsung shih-lu is not the one that Han Yü wrote.<sup>40</sup> It is, of course, quite possible that Han Yü did not know much about Li one way or the other, and that he was simply doing the same thing he had done many times before in seeking a recommendation from a high official whom he did not know. There is insufficient evidence to support any definite conclusion, but it seems more likely that Han Yü would flatter someone he didn't know at all than that he would praise someone whom he knew to be evil.

If Han Yü had indeed lost his position at the National University and the salary that went with it, then he might have been under economic pressure to find another source of income. His job at the School of the Four Gates had paid 25,000 cash per month<sup>41</sup> and he had a large family to support. The size of his family increased when his nephew Lao-ch'eng died unexpectedly, leaving Han Yü with the

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<sup>39</sup> HYYC, pp. 62-63.

<sup>40</sup> E. G. Pulleyblank, "The Shun-tsung shih-lu," Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, vol. 19, pt. 2 (1957), p. 342.

<sup>41</sup> Wang P'ü (922-982), ed., T'ang hui-yao (Important Documents of the T'ang) 3 vols. (961; Taipei: Shih-chieh shu-chü, 1974), vol. 3, ch. 91, p. 1662.

responsibility of caring for his family which included two sons and at least one daughter. Han Yü did not know the exact date or the cause of Lao-ch'eng's death. He expressed his sorrow in a sacrificial prayer which is both a famous piece of literature and an important source of biographical information for Han Yü.<sup>42</sup>

Han Yü's period of unemployment can not have been very long, for in a memorial submitted in the seventh month he refers to himself as receiving a monthly salary but says that he is not a court official, so presumably the salary he refers to is the one he received as a professor at the National University. Han Yü submitted his memorial in response to a decision of the court on the twenty-second day of the seventh month to suspend the tribute (chin-shih) and selection examinations because of a drought and famine in the capital area.<sup>43</sup> He pointed out that the previous year's harvest had been abundant and that the merchants certainly had a surplus in storage, while the candidates for the examinations constituted only a very small increase in the population of the city and brought enough capital to support themselves. Suspending the examinations might unduly frighten the populace while causing some to lose their

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<sup>42</sup> HCLC, pp. 195-198; tr. Liu, Chinese Classical Prose, pp. 83-89; Anthology of Chinese Literature, pp. 246-249.

<sup>43</sup> CTS 13, p. 398.

occupations. Just in case this sort of practical reasoning was not effective, he added an old saying that persons losing their employment could bring on a drought. He noted further that the emperor symbolized yang (an excess of which could cause drought) while the examination candidates symbolized yin (which could help to compensate for an excess of yang).<sup>44</sup>

In the winter of 803 Han Yü was appointed an investigating censor (chien-ch'a yü-shih) by the vice censor-in-chief (yü-shih chung-ch'eng), Li Wen (d. 804).<sup>45</sup> He remained in this position for only a short time before being demoted and banished to the south, supposedly because of a memorial he submitted in the eleventh month. The memorial asks for the suspension of the taxes in money and grain for the capital area because of the long drought and resultant hunger among the people. Han Yü's argument here is relatively concise and to the point. Because of the long drought and an early frost, not one-tenth of the year's crop has survived. He praises the emperor's humanity and compassion, but says the people are still in dire straits. He has heard of men abandoning their children and driving off their wives to get a mouthful of food. Houses have been

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<sup>44</sup> HCLC, pp.337-338.

<sup>45</sup> No biography. See the sacrificial prayer by Liu Tsung-yüan (773-819), Liu Ho-tung chi, 2 vols. (Shanghai: Jen-min sh'u-pan she, 1974), vol. 2, ch. 40, pp. 645-646.

torn up and trees cut down in order to get money to pay taxes, while the roads are full of the cold and hungry and the dead fill the gorges. Those who have the means have already paid their taxes while those who have not are still pressed to pay. Han Yü assumes that the emperor has not been told about this situation and begs him to show these innocent people the same clemency he has shown in the past for criminals guilty of capital offenses. Besides, the capital area is the heart and root of the country and its people deserve double consideration. Now it is snowing continuously and next year's harvest will certainly be abundant. Pressing for payment now would harm the people but gain little, while delaying would help them to exist now and have benefits in the future. Han Yü therefore asks for a special edict halting collection of taxes for this year in the capital area so there will still be some grain and silkworms left for the coming year.<sup>46</sup>

Han Yü's biographies tell us that after this memorial was submitted, he was "slandered by a favored minister" and banished to the post of magistrate of Yang-shan in Lien-chou (in Kwangtung). The fact that two other censors were banished at the same time, and the form of the memorial's title suggest that it might have represented the opinions of several censors, not only Han

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<sup>46</sup> HCLC, pp. 338-339.

Yü.<sup>47</sup> No contemporary source gives the name of the minister who slandered Han Yü, but in the Tzu-chih t'ung-chien Ssu-ma Kuang implies that it was probably Li Shih.<sup>48</sup> The Shun-tsung shih-lu, in recording Li Shih's later demotion and banishment, states that he ignored an imperial edict and collected taxes as usual (suggesting that Han Yü's memorial may have been approved).<sup>49</sup>

If Han Yü was sincere in his earlier praise of Li Shih, then he must have changed his opinion soon after he arrived at the capital--if Li Shih was, indeed, the target of the protest contained in the memorial. There remains a possibility that Li Shih had nothing to do with Han Yü's banishment.

Although it seems reasonable that Li Shih might have been responsible for Han Yü's banishment, Han Yü himself suspected that his friends and fellow censors Liu Yü-hsi (772-842)<sup>50</sup> and Liu Taung-yüan (773-819)<sup>51</sup> might have been

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<sup>47</sup> The names of the other censors are given in Han Yü's tomb inscription for Chang Shu (757-816?) in HCLC, pp. 266-268. The date is indicated in his sacrificial prayer for Chang Shu in HCLC, pp. 182-184. See also Huang-fu Shih, Han Yü shen-tao pei (Stele Inscription on the Path to Han Yü's Grave), in Ch'üan T'ang wen, vol. 14, ch. 687, p. 10b; and Li Ao, hsing-chuang, p. 22b.

<sup>48</sup> TCTC 236, p. 7604.

<sup>49</sup> HCLC, p. 406.

<sup>50</sup> See Chang Ta-jen, Liu Yü-hsi nien-p'ü (Taipei: Shang-wu yin-shu kuan, 1977).

indiscreet in revealing the contents of private conversations. Lo cites three poems that seem to suggest this and to blame his demotion on the faction of Wang Shu-wen (753-806), which was to dominate the court during the brief reign of the emperor Shun-tsung in 805.<sup>52</sup> Lo quotes numerous opinions concerning this issue based on the writings of Han Yü and Liu Tsung-yüan, and concludes that it is probable that the faction of Wang Shu-wen and Wei Chih-yi, which had already formed at the end of Te-tsung's reign, was responsible for his banishment. It appears that the memorial was given as the excuse for Han Yü's demotion but that he did not believe that was the real reason and still feared reprisals after the Wang faction had removed Li Shih from office.<sup>53</sup> It seems likely, therefore, that Han Yü had discussed with his fellow censors his intention to submit a memorial critical of Wang Shu-wen, or of his group, and that his banishment had prevented him from doing so.

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<sup>51</sup> William H. Nienhauser, Jr., et al., Liu Tsung-yüan (New York: Twayne, 1973); Jennings Mason Gentzler, A Literary Biography of Liu Tsung-yüan (773-819), unpublished Ph. D. dissertation (Columbia University, 1966).

<sup>52</sup> HCLS, pp. 132-140 (tr. Hartman, Language and Allusion, pp. 5-7), 144-148, 151-156. The most detailed account of Wang Shu-wen and his clique is in the Shun-tsung shih-lu. This has been translated by Bernard S. Solomon, The Veritable Record of the T'ang Emperor Shun-tsung (February 28, 805-August 31, 805): Han Yü's Shun-tsung shih-lu (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955).

<sup>53</sup> HYYC, pp. 64-68. On the early formation of the clique, see The Cambridge History of China, pp. 601-602.

This would explain his suspicions regarding his two friends, whom he knew to be on good terms with Wang.

Han Yü was accompanied on his journey to the south by Chang Shu (757-816?), one of the two other censors who had been banished along with him.<sup>54</sup> Chang reached his post first and Han Yü then continued alone to Yang-shan.<sup>55</sup> He remained there for the rest of the year 804. According to his biographies his good administration led the people of Yang-shan to name their children after him.<sup>56</sup>

Conditions at court changed in 805 due to the death of Te-tsung and the accession of Shun-tsung on the twenty-sixth day of the first month. As crown prince Shun-tsung had been the focus of a small group of idealistic officials who advocated a program of reforms to solve the problems of the empire. They had kept their plans secret until Shun-tsung became emperor, and their secrecy may have prompted Han Yü's suspicions about them. Unfortunately for the reformers, Shun-tsung suffered a stroke in 804 which seriously limited his ability to intervene personally in governmental affairs. At first the leaders of the reform group took advantage of this circumstance by isolating the

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<sup>54</sup> See above, n. 47.

<sup>55</sup> See HCLS, pp. 87-89, and Owen, Meng Chiao and Han Yü, pp. 108-110 for poems written along the way.

<sup>56</sup> Li Ao, hsing-chuang, p. 22b; Huang-fu Shih, shen-tao pei, p. 10b; HTS 176, p. 5255.



emperor in the palace and controlling the government in his name. They succeeded in implementing some reforms, but also suppressed their opponents and alienated many powerful men. Before long they were quarrelling among themselves and when they failed to win the support of the army and the emperor's condition became worse, they had insufficient support to retain their monopoly on political power. They had only risen to power in the first place because they had Shun-tsung's backing. Without his active intervention they could not resist the strength of the opposition they had provoked.

A coalition of eunuchs, Han-lin academicians, and military governors finally forced Shun-tsung to abdicate in favor of his son, who assumed the throne in the eighth month of 805 as the emperor Hsien-tsung. The members of the Wang Shu-wen faction were removed from office, and Wang was executed the next year while other members of the faction, including Liu Tsung-yüan and Liu Yü-hsi, were sent into exile.<sup>57</sup>

While all of this was going on at court, Han Yü remained in the south. On the twenty-fourth day of the second month, at the beginning of Shun-tsung's reign, an amnesty was issued for the whole empire. Apparently as a

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<sup>57</sup> See the discussion of this period by Michael Dalby in The Cambridge History of China, pp. 601-607, and the sources cited there.

result of this, Han Yü was allowed to leave Yang-shan sometime near the end of summer or the beginning of autumn. Lacking any specific assignment, he went to stay with Li Po-k'ang, the prefect of Ch'en-chou in Hunan, while awaiting new orders.<sup>58</sup> He remained there for three months until the accession of Hsien-tsung brought another amnesty. On the fourteenth day of the eighth month, five days after Hsien-tsung formally ascended the throne, Han Yü and Chang Shu received letters of appointment to Chiang-ling on the central Yangtze (in present Hupei). Han Yü was to be an administrator of the law section of the prefectural administration (fa-ts'ao ts'an-chün), and Chang Shu an administrator of the personnel evaluation section (kung-ts'ao ts'an-chün).

This was an improvement in the sense that it was closer to the capital than their previous posts, but Han Yü had hoped to be recalled to Ch'ang-an. In a poem given to Chang Shu on the day after they received their appointments, he expressed the belief that it was the local civil governor who had prevented them from receiving the full benefit of the amnesty.<sup>59</sup> The commentary to this poem notes that the governor in question was Yang P'ing. Ch'ien

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<sup>58</sup> HCLC, pp. 180-181, sacrificial prayer for Li Po-k'ang.

<sup>59</sup> HCLS, p. 120.

Chung-lien adds that Yang was Liu Tsung-Yüan's father-in-law and a supporter of the Wang Shu-wen faction, so Han Yü's charge was probably correct. Lo Lien-t'ien agrees.<sup>60</sup>

Because he had contracted a case of malaria which caused him to suffer from chills and fever, Han Yü delayed his departure until the first week of the ninth month and then proceeded together with Chang Shu to Chiang-ling.<sup>61</sup> The stages of their journey were marked by poems that Han Yü wrote along the way.<sup>62</sup> They finally arrived in Chiang-ling at about the end of the tenth month.

Shortly after their arrival they encountered Liu Tsung-yüan and Liu Yü-hsi, who had both been demoted twice and were on their way to exile at distant southern posts. Han Yü noted their visit in a poem in which he recounted the crimes of the Wang Shu-wen faction, but sympathized with his friends' plight.<sup>63</sup>

On the ninth day of the twelfth month he sent a letter to Li Sun (739-809), vice-president of the Board of War and a former protege of Lu Chih.<sup>64</sup> He described his

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<sup>60</sup> HCLS, pp. 120-121; HYYC, p. 70.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. HCLS, pp. 122-124, poem on "reproaching malarial spirits."

<sup>62</sup> HCLS, pp. 126-144.

<sup>63</sup> HCLS, pp. 151-156.

<sup>64</sup> Biography in CTS 123, pp. 3521-3523; see also Twitchett, "Lu Chih," p. 120.

misfortunes and lack of recognition and said that he was offering a scroll of "old texts" (chiu wen^\_) that "will help establish the teaching of the Way" (fu shu chiao tao).<sup>65</sup> Lo Lien-t'ien thinks that this probably refers to the set of five essays beginning with the Yüan tao which are among Han YÜ's most famous writings. Lo suspects that they were written during the three months that Han YÜ spent in Ch'en-chou waiting for an appointment.<sup>66</sup> E. G. Pulleyblank also believes that these essays were written during Han YÜ's period of exile. He acknowledges however, that the reference in the letter to Li Sun (if it does indeed refer to these essays) only establishes the latest date at which they could have been written, and it is possible that they could have been written earlier.<sup>67</sup>

The contents of these essays will be discussed in some detail in a later chapter. We might note here, however, two alternate dates for them that have been suggested by modern scholars. J. K. Rideout regarded the essays Yüan tao and Yüan hsing as responses to Li Ao's

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<sup>65</sup> HCLC, pp. 81-82.

<sup>66</sup> HYYC, p. 70.

<sup>67</sup> Pulleyblank, "Neo-Confucianism and Neo-Legalism," p. 333, n. 148.

Fu-hsing shu, which he dated to the period 799-800.<sup>68</sup>

Robert Somers has suggested that they were written as model essays for his students when Han Yü was a professor at the National University (from the winter of 801 to the winter of 803).<sup>69</sup> If one takes these differing opinions as setting a range of dates, it would seem fairly safe to say that these essays belong to the first five years of the ninth century.

Did Han Yü's letter to Li Sun bring him the favorable recommendation that he desired? There is no record of Li's response, but in the sixth month of 806 he received an appointment as a professor at the National University. His new position was in the School of the Sons of the State (kuo-tzu hsüeh) which admitted sons of the nobility and of officials of the third rank and higher. Han Yü's new rank was fifth degree, first class. This was a significant advancement because there was a sharp distinction in status between officials of the fifth and higher degrees and those ranking below the fifth degree. It also meant that through his students Han Yü had a potential means of access to some of the most influential men in the empire.

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<sup>68</sup> J. K. Rideout, "The Context of the Yüan Tao and the Yüan Hsing," Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, vol. 12, pt. 2 (1947-48), pp. 403-408.

<sup>69</sup> Personal communication.

As he passed through Hsiang-yang on his way to Ch'ang-an, Han Yü sent a letter to the local military governor, YÜ Ti, in which he praised the governor's literary talent and virtue.<sup>70</sup> A part of this letter has been quoted above in our discussion of Han Yü's literary theories. Lo Lien-t'ien notes that Po Chü-yi (772-846) criticized YÜ for his bad character and concludes that Han YÜ's praises were not sincere.<sup>71</sup> We might speculate that Han YÜ was able to justify this sort of flattery in his own mind on the grounds that he was merely trying to be polite and to establish a positive relationship with a powerful official (YÜ became a chief minister in 808 and retained that rank until 813).

Back in Ch'ang-an, Han Yü was reunited with his friends Chang Chi, Meng Chiao and others. He was undoubtedly happy to be back in the capital and surrounded by friends. The increased level of his social activity is reflected in the number of linked verses he produced at this time in cooperation with his fellow poets.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> HCLC, pp. 85-86.

<sup>71</sup> HYVC, p. 72. Po's comments on YÜ are in Ch'üan T'ang wen, vol. 14, ch. 667, pp. 5b-8a, and 12a-b.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. HCLS, chs. 4 and 5, and Owen, Meng Chiao and Han Yü, ch. 7.

## LIFE IN THE CAPITAL: 807 TO 818

Han Yü's promotion and transfer to Ch'ang-an naturally caused him to feel optimistic about the future under the new emperor. Within a year Hsien-tsung successfully put down two rebellions of the sort that had occurred after the deaths of Tung Chin and Chang Chien-feng, and this further fueled Han Yü's feelings of optimism. In the first month of 807 he wrote a long poem in praise of Hsien-tsung called "The Sagely Virtue of Yüan-ho".<sup>1</sup> Yüan-ho was the name of the new reign period, and it did become famous in later times both for the quality of its literature and for the extent to which central political authority over the provinces was restored. Han Yü may well have felt satisfaction that his talents had finally been recognized, but he soon found that such recognition could bring with it unwanted side effects.

In an essay entitled "Explanatory Words" (shih-yen) written in the spring of 807, he recalled how after his return to the capital he had been summoned to see the chief minister Cheng Yin (752-829), who had asked for samples of his writing (presumably with the thought of recommending him

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<sup>1</sup> HCLS, pp. 273-283.

as a Han-lin Academician), but that after this he had been slandered, both on this occasion and again several months later. In the essay he gives reasons why one should not be concerned with such slanderous attacks, but he was obviously affected by them.<sup>2</sup>

The "Account of Conduct" (hsing-chuang), written after Han Yü's death by Li Ao, says that this slander came from those who competed with him for preferment,<sup>3</sup> but it is also possible that he had made enemies because of his attitude of pride in his adherence to Confucian values and self-confidence regarding his literary ability. In a letter written later to his friend Feng Su, he admits that at this time he associated only with those with whom he was in harmony and consciously avoided those he didn't agree with. He realized later that this had been a factor in giving rise to slanders against him and reflected that he was lucky that the results had not been even worse.<sup>4</sup>

Han Yü was not prepared to deal with this sort of situation, and even seems to have suffered for a time from a form of paranoia. He describes himself in a poem as being reluctant even to answer a knock on his door, preferring to

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<sup>2</sup> HCLC, pp. 40-41; tr. by Hartman, Language and Allusion, pp. 185-192.

<sup>3</sup> Hsing-chuang, pp. 22b-23a.

<sup>4</sup> HCLC, p. 112.



stay at home with his books rather than give others an excuse to start new rumors about him.<sup>5</sup> While this self-description is probably an exaggeration, Han Yü was certainly uncomfortable with the idea that he always had to be prepared to defend himself against false rumors. Li Ao says that it was to avoid trouble that he asked to be transferred to the branch of the National University in Lo-yang.<sup>6</sup> His request was approved and at the end of summer Han Yü moved to Lo-yang where he remained until the summer of 811.

In 808 Han Yü's appointment as a probationary (ch'üan) professor was made regular (chen).<sup>7</sup> It was also in this year that he became the guardian of his cousin Yü's five children (his name is written with a different character than Han Yü's and pronounced in a different tone, but has the same romanization). Yü had been the older brother of Han Yen, and should logically have been the one to care for Yen's family after his death, but he was irresponsible and was either unwilling or unable to do so. Now upon his death Han Yü accepted the responsibility of caring for his family as well. The oldest daughter was eighteen, and Han Yü arranged for her marriage to his

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<sup>5</sup> HCLS, pp. 187-189.

<sup>6</sup> Hsing-chuang, p. 23a.

<sup>7</sup> Hsing-chuang, p. 23a.

student Chou K'uang, who had received his chin-shih degree in 806.<sup>8</sup>

One of the characteristics of a virtuous Confucian minister was supposed to be the ability to attract other men of virtue to join him in government service. Han Yü attempted to do this by writing a letter in the twelfth month of 808 to Li Po (not the famous poet, who died in 762 before Han Yü was born), a virtuous scholar who had been living in retirement on Shao-shih mountain despite offers of appointment from court officials, including Li Sun, ever since the beginning of the Yüan-ho period. Li Po liked Han Yü's argument that a virtuous ruler deserved his services and that hiding himself away was inconsistent with the principles of humanity and righteousness, so he came out of the mountains to live in Lo-yang, although not until 814 did he formally accept an official appointment.<sup>9</sup>

Li Ao had accompanied Han Yü to Lo-yang, but in the first month of 809 he left for the south to take a job as secretary to Yang Yü-ling, the military governor of Ling-

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<sup>8</sup> HCLC, p. 321, tomb inscription for Chou K'uang's wife.

<sup>9</sup> HCLC, pp. 386-387. Li Po's biography is in HTS 118, pp. 4281-4286.

nan (Kwangtung). Han Yü accompanied him part of the way and wrote a poem to commemorate their parting.<sup>10</sup>

In the third month Han Yü and two friends went to visit Li Po, who had not yet left his mountain home for Lo-yang, and Han Yü stayed for several days to see the sights along with Li and two other residents of the mountain, a Taoist monk and a Buddhist monk. Han Yü described their visit in an inscription on a stone pillar of a Taoist temple.<sup>11</sup>

On the tenth day of the sixth month Han Yü received a new appointment as vice director of the Lo-yang branch office of the Bureau of Criminal Administration and a concurrent appointment as supervisor of the Bureau of Sacrifices (tu-kuan yüan-wai-lang fen-ssu tung-tu ping p'an tz'u-pu).<sup>12</sup> Lo Lien-t'ien notes that Han Yü's duties in the Bureau of Sacrifices included managing sacrifices, the astronomical water clock, national taboos (including both

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<sup>10</sup> HCLS, pp. 308-309; cf. Li Ao's Lai-nan lu (Record of Coming South), Ch'üan T'ang wen, vol. 13, ch. 638, pp. 9b-10a. Li Ao's journey is summarized by Edward H. Schafer in The Vermilion Bird: T'ang Images of the South (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), pp. 22-24.

<sup>11</sup> HCLC, p. 429.

<sup>12</sup> Part of the edict of appointment to the first post is reproduced in Hung Hsing-tsu (1090-1155), Han-tzu nien-p'u (A Chronological Biography of Master Han), ch. 5, p. 11a, in Ma Jih-lu, ed., Han-Liu nien-p'u (Chronological Biographies of Han Yü and Liu Tsung-yüan) (Taipei: Shang-wu yin-shu kuan).

names and dates to be avoided) and temple names, divination and medicine, and Buddhist and Taoist affairs. The latter function gave Han Yü the opportunity to take action in an area that had long concerned him. Control of Buddhist and Taoist establishments in the capital had been in the hands of eunuch "commissioners for merit and virtue" (kung-te shih) since 788, but Han Yü "restored control to the Bureau of Sacrifices as provided for in the rules contained in the T'ang liu-tien (Six Institutes of the T'ang, a book of administrative rules for the six departments of T'ang government, compiled c. 737), and severely punished (or executed) those who were dishonest, thereby bringing about a temporary reform in Buddhist practices."<sup>13</sup> We have no more specific information about this occurrence. We might note, however, that during the An Lu-shan rebellion the government had resorted to the sale of "monk certificates" on a large scale as a money-raising measure, and there were consequently a large number of persons who claimed the status of monk only for the purpose of gaining exemption from taxes and labor service with no real intention to pursue a religious vocation. Following the example of the

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<sup>13</sup> Shen-tao pei, pp. 10b-11a; date from TCTC 248, p. 8024. The term chu normally means "to execute," but Han Yü sometimes uses it in the broader sense of "to punish severely," and it is possible that this how Huang-fu Shih is using the term here. According to T'ang law, an official in Han Yü's position did not have the power to order an execution solely on his own authority.

central government, local officials also sold such certificates even though they were forbidden by law from doing so.<sup>14</sup> Han Yü was known for his anti-Buddhist and anti-Taoist sentiments. However, since his actions do not seem to have provoked any outcry of protest from the orthodox Buddhist religious establishment, it may have been false monks and nuns such as these who were the targets of Han Yü's reforms.

Because he had taken away their authority, the eunuchs used harsh words to complain about Han Yü to the governor of Lo-yang, Cheng Yü-ch'ing (776-839).<sup>15</sup> However, Han Yü knew Cheng, for he had been the head of the National University for a short time in 806 while Han Yü was there, and he had later been mayor of Ho-nan in 807 at the time when Han Yü first moved to Lo-yang. It is also possible that Cheng was related to Han Hui's widow, who was descended from the same Jung-yang Cheng lineage.

Although the governor did not respond to their complaints, the eunuchs still wished to see Han Yü removed from office. In a letter to Cheng, Han Yü complained that he came into conflict with the eunuchs on a daily basis in

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<sup>14</sup> Kenneth Ch'en, "The Economic Background of the Hui-ch'ang Suppression of Buddhism," Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies, vol. 19 (1956), pp. 80-81.

<sup>15</sup> Biographies in CTS 158, pp. 4163-4168; HTS 165, pp. 5059-5062.

the course of his duties in the Bureau of Sacrifices and that they spied on him, waiting for him to commit a crime or make a mistake. He found his duties burdensome as well and asked for a leave of absence on account of illness.<sup>16</sup> This letter is not dated, but since Han Yü refers to himself as having held this position for two years it must have been written no earlier than the sixth month of 810.

In the winter of 810 Han Yü was appointed magistrate of Ho-nan district, which included the southern half of Lo-yang. He again came into conflict with the eunuchs when he found men dressed as soldiers of the Shen-ts'ê Army who had set up a shop where they sold cakes in the market of Lo-yang. Han Yü had them arrested and accused them of being imposters who had obtained their uniforms by bribing real soldiers. When they did not respond to his questions he had them beaten, and their eunuch commander lodged a complaint against Han Yü with the governor. Han Yü wrote to Cheng Yü-ch'ing explaining his actions, which he considered reasonable and justified, and offering to resign if Cheng thought he had acted improperly.<sup>17</sup> The governor ignored the eunuch's complaint and Han Yü kept his job, his reputation enhanced by his willingness to risk the wrath of the eunuchs in defense of what he believed to be right.

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<sup>16</sup> HCLC, pp. 86-87.

<sup>17</sup> HCLC, pp. 87-88; HYYC, p. 77.

During this time Han Yü also showed that he was not afraid of the military governors. It was customary for the military governors to maintain residences in the capital for the use of their representatives who had to go there frequently on official business. Han Yü discovered that several of these residences were being used to conceal bodies of armed men, and that officials of the central government who knew about it had failed to report it for fear of offending the military governors. Han Yü sent a report to the throne anyway, and even though the mayor and the governor feared that there would be trouble, nothing happened. The emperor was said to have been pleased and to have spoken of Han Yü as one who helped him. Five years later such concealed troops were employed in a plot intended to support a rebellion by military governors in central China, but the plot was foiled and Han Yü's earlier action may have been instrumental in alerting the court to this potential threat.<sup>18</sup>

One of the candidates for the chin-shih examination of 810 was a talented poet named Li Ho (790-816).<sup>19</sup> Li Ho had sought and received Han Yü's recommendation and had passed the Ho-nan prefectural qualifying examination. He

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<sup>18</sup> Huang-fu Shih, shen-tao pei, p. 11a.

<sup>19</sup> See South, Li Ho; and Kuo-ch'ing Tu, Li Ho (Boston: Twayne, 1979).

was denied the right to take the chin-shih examination at Ch'ang-an, however, on the grounds that by doing so he would violate a taboo on his father's name, which was Chin-su. Han Yü suspected that his enemies were responsible for Li Ho's predicament, since one who sponsored a candidate for the examinations was held responsible for the candidate's misbehavior. The accusation lodged against Li Ho might thus be an indirect attack on Han Yü.

Accordingly, Han Yü wrote a defense of Li Ho which also serves as a good example of Han Yü's method of argumentation when no ideological issues were involved. Han Yü begins his essay with an introduction explaining the circumstances that prompted him to write it.

#### An Argument on Taboo Names

I wrote a letter to Li Ho encouraging him to take the chin-shih examination. After Ho passed the chin-shih (qualifying) examination he became famous, but someone slandered him, saying, "Li Ho's father's name was Chin-su, so he should not have taken the chin-shih examination. The one who encouraged him to do so was wrong." Those who listened to this did not investigate the matter, but agreed and supported the slander with similar words. Huang-fu Shih (777-834?)<sup>20</sup> said, "If this matter is not clarified, you and Li Ho will both be considered guilty of a crime." I replied, "It is so."

The law says, "Of the two characters of a (parent's) name, do not regard as taboo just one." The commentary says, "This means that if (as in the case of Confucius's mother, whose name was Cheng

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<sup>20</sup> The most detailed source on Huang-fu Shih is Chiang Kuo-chen, Huang-fu Ch'ih-cheng yen-chiu (Studies on Huang-fu Shih) (Taipei: Yu-shih wen-hua shih-yeh kung-ssu, 1975).



Tsai) one says Cheng, then one should not say Tsai; or if one says Tsai, then one should not say Cheng." The law says, "Do not regard as taboo homophonous names (which are written with different characters)." The commentary says, "This means the category of names like Yü (the legendary sage ruler) and yü (rain), or Ch'iu (Confucius's personal name) and ch'iu (grass)." Now as Li Ho's father's name is Chin-su, would Li Ho in taking the chin-shih examination violate the law regarding the two characters of his parent's name? Would he violate the law regarding homophonous names? If the father's name being Chin-su means that the son cannot take the chin-shih examination, would it not mean similarly that if the father's name were Jen (benevolence) the son could not be a human being (jen)?

Now when did the practice of having taboo names begin? Was it not the Duke of Chou and Confucius who made laws and institutions to instruct the world? The Duke of Chou in making the Book of Odes did not observe taboos on names. Confucius did not regard just one of the two characters of his mother's name as taboo. In the Spring and Autumn period (722-481 B.C.) there was no ridicule of the non-avoidance of homophonous names. The grandson of King K'ang of the Chou, whose name was Chao (to encourage), was in fact King Chao (bright). (Confucius's disciple) Tseng Shen's father's name was Hsi (white), but he did not regard as taboo the word hsi (formerly). In Chou times there was a person named Ch'ü Ch'ü, and in Han times there was someone named Tu Tu. In these cases how should their sons have observed the name taboo? Should they have regarded homophones as taboo, and thus made their own surnames taboo? Or should they not have regarded as taboo words which were homophonous?

The Han dynasty observed the taboo on Emperor Wu's personal name Ch'ü (penetrate) by substituting the word t'ung (to penetrate), but I have not heard that they applied the taboo to the term "carriage ruts" (chü-ch'ü) by substituting some other character. They observed the taboo on Empress Lü's personal Chih (pheasant) by substituting the term yeh-chi (pheasant), but I have not heard that they also applied the taboo to the word chih (to govern) as in chih t'ien-hsia (to govern the empire). At the present time, in memorials and edicts I have not heard of taboos on terms homophonous with the personal names of our T'ang emperors. Only eunuchs

and palace women do not dare to utter such homophonous words lest they should violate some law.

What models should gentlemen hold to in their speech and conduct? Now we have investigated it in the classics, we have verified it in the law, and we have examined it in terms of national institutions. Is Li Ho's taking the chin-shih examination permissible, or is it not permissible?

If in all one's service to one's parents one can be like Tseng Shen, there should be no criticism. If in one's relations with others one can be like the Duke of Chou and Confucius, that also should be sufficient. Today, however, the gentlemen of the world do not strive to make their actions like the actions of Tseng Shen, the Duke of Chou, and Confucius. Yet they observe the taboo on their parents' names, and thus strive to surpass Tseng Shen, the Duke of Chou, and Confucius, in this way revealing their delusion. The Duke of Chou, Confucius, and Tseng Shen in the end cannot be surpassed. In their "surpassing" the Duke of Chou, Confucius, and Tseng Shen, they are comparing themselves to eunuchs and palace women. In this case is it then true that eunuchs and palace women in their filiality to their parents are more worthy than the Duke of Chou, Confucius, and Tseng Shen?<sup>21</sup>

Li Ho won lasting fame for his poetry, but he never did get his chin-shih degree. Han Yü's essay shows clearly that the accusation of impropriety that prevented Li Ho from getting his degree must have been based on custom, not law, and suggests that enforcement of such customary taboos was probably arbitrary. This, in turn, tends to support Han Yü's suspicions about the motivations of Li Ho's accusers.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> HCLC, pp. 34-35. There is a partial translation of this essay in South, Li Ho, pp. 257-258.

<sup>22</sup> For further details regarding this incident, see South, Li Ho, pp. 253-263.

At the end of the first month of 811 Han Yü wrote a playful essay, "Farewell to Misfortune" (Sung-ch'üung wen), in which he imagined himself preparing to send off spirits symbolizing aspects of his character that had caused him trouble throughout his life. The qualities he identifies in himself are not so much negative--some of them are quite positive--as disadvantageous because they prevent him from winning the approval of others. His knowledge (of moral principles) causes him to appear eccentric and aloof, while his choice of texts for study are not such as will bring him fortune or fame. The style that gives him pleasure is too varied and unusual to be popular. Fate has given him an unattractive appearance that does not reveal the beauty in his heart and has made him the first to attract censure, but among the last to win profit. Despite exerting himself to the utmost in dealing with others, his efforts are met with enmity. These qualities have caused him much trouble, but he has been unable to change himself. The spirits reply in their own defense, pointing out that he is short sighted in wanting to see them go because in the long term these are the qualities that distinguish the gentleman from the ordinary man and these are the qualities that will bring him lasting fame. They remind him that, "Only when you are at odds with the world are you in touch with Heaven." Han Yü

finally relents and allows the spirits to stay,  
acknowledging the correctness of their argument.<sup>23</sup>

Beneath the humor, this is a defense of Han Yü's refusal to change his values even though it might be to his advantage to do so. There is also an echo of the view expressed in his "Preface on Sending off Meng Tung-yeh (i.e., Meng Chiao)" written in 803, in which he argues that dissatisfaction with the circumstances of one's life can stimulate literary creativity.<sup>24</sup> The fact that Han Yü is able to talk about himself in a humorous way saves the essay from the appearance of being merely self-serving. The same ability to laugh at his own misfortunes appears elsewhere in his writings as well, for example in his "Poem on Losing One's Teeth," written in 803.<sup>25</sup>

In the summer of 811 Han Yü returned to Ch'ang-an as a vice director in the Bureau of Operations (chih-fang yüan-wai-lang). This was the second-ranking position in the Bureau which was headed by a director (lang-chung)

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<sup>23</sup> HCLC, pp. 328-329. The quotation is from Hightower's translation in "Han Yü as Humorist," pp. 20-22. There is also a translation by J. K. Rideout in Birch, Anthology of Chinese Literature, pp. 244-246.

<sup>24</sup> HCLC, p. 136.

<sup>25</sup> HCLS, pp. 81-82; tr. by Owen, Meng Chiao and Han Yü, pp. 85-86, and by Charles Hartman in Wu-chi Liu and Irving Lo, eds., Sunflower Splendor: Three Thousand Years of Chinese Poetry (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975), 172-173.

responsible to the Ministry of War. The Bureau was in charge of maps, fortifications, garrisons and frontier posts, towers for alarm fires, and soldiers protecting the frontier. They also gathered data on geography and on the customs of foreign peoples.<sup>26</sup>

In the ninth month of 811 there was a legal case in which a man committed murder to avenge his father and then turned himself in for punishment. The emperor asked for opinions on how to handle such a case where law (fa) and propriety (li) were in conflict, and Han Yü submitted a memorial which concluded that since no two such cases were alike it would be inappropriate to establish a single rule for all cases. He recommended that each such case should be submitted to the Department of State Affairs which should deliberate on the matter and report its conclusion to the throne based on the particular merits of the case.<sup>27</sup>

Han Yü lost this position as a result of defending a local magistrate who was accused of corruption. Han Yü apparently knew the magistrate and submitted a memorial to the throne in his defense. A censor who was sent to

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<sup>26</sup> Des Rotours, Traite des Fonctionnaires, vol. 1, pp. 109-110.

<sup>27</sup> HCLC, pp. 341-343. For a translation of this essay and a comparison with Liu Tsung-yüan's essay on the same subject, see Spring, Tang Guwen, pp. 72-75. Hsien-tsung commuted the death sentence to 100 blows: TCTC 238, pp. 7685-7686.

investigate the charges reported that the magistrate was guilty of accepting bribes, and consequently Han Yü was accused of having behaved irresponsibly in defending him. On the sixth day of the second month of 812 he was again made a professor at the National University.<sup>28</sup>

Han Yü's duties as a professor were not arduous, but he was dissatisfied with his position because he felt that his abilities were not being fully utilized. He put his feelings into an imaginary dialogue between a professor and a student. The professor begins by addressing his assembled students, telling them that it is important for them to develop their talents diligently because there are now wise rulers in the land and all those with even the slightest talent have been recognized and employed. He is interrupted by a student who accuses the professor of deceiving the students. The student describes in detail how the professor has labored diligently all his life to develop his abilities and promote Confucian values, producing works of literature that differ in style from the great works of the past but resemble them in craftsmanship. Nevertheless, the professor's career has been undistinguished and his talents remain unrecognized. Yet the professor remains oblivious to his own failure and even tries to give advice to others.

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<sup>28</sup> Huang-fu Shih, shen-tao pei, p. 11a; Li Ao, hsing-chuang, p. 23a; CTS 160, p. 4196; HYYC, p. 83.

The professor replies that wise ministers employ people according to their capabilities. He cites the examples of Mencius and Hsün-tzu who despite their superior talents failed to find suitable employment in their own times. He then argues that his abilities are not suited to present conditions and that he is fortunate to be as well off as he is. His present position is undoubtedly what he deserves and it would be inappropriate for him to question it.<sup>29</sup>

The reader is clearly not expected to agree with the professor, whose function is to stress the extent to which present reality departs from the ideal. The professor's career as described by the student is an exact match for Han Yü's career, and the student is obviously giving voice to Han Yü's own feelings of frustration. Unlike the fictional professor, Han YÜ was not resigned to his fate.

He finally got an administrative position early in the year 813. On the twenty-second day of the third month he was given concurrent appointments as director of the Bureau of Review (pi-pu lang-chung) and editor-compiler in the Bureau of History. The Bureau of Review was a division of the Ministry of Justice. It exercised control over accounting procedures for official salaries, public buildings, fines, and general auditing supervision of

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<sup>29</sup> HCLC, pp. 25-27; tr. Spring, Tang Guwen, pp. 169-174.

government expenditures.<sup>30</sup> The Bureau of History was at this time under the supervision of the chief minister Li Chi-fu (758-814).<sup>31</sup>

In the eleventh month of 813 Li Chi-fu assigned Han Yü and several others to revise the existing version of the Veritable Records of the Emperor Shun-tsung (Shun-tsung shih-lu), which had been prepared by Wei Ch'u-hou. Han Yü added more material to expand the history of Shun-tsung's reign from three chapters to five, but Li Chi-fu was very careful and wanted to investigate further before presenting a final version to the throne. The history still had not been submitted when Li Chi-fu died on the third day of the tenth month of 814. On the twenty-first day of the same month Han Yü was appointed director of the Bureau of Evaluations (k'ao-kung lang-chung), an office which had responsibility for overseeing the annual evaluation of the performance of both civil and military officials. On the fifteenth day of the twelfth month Han Yü was given the additional duty of composing edicts and proclamations (chih chih-kao).<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Twitchett, Financial Administration, p. 103.

<sup>31</sup> Biographies in CTS 148, pp. 3992-3997; HTS 146, pp. 4738-4744. See also The Cambridge History of China, pp. 627-627.

<sup>32</sup> Hung Hsing-tsu, nien-p'u, ch. 6, p. 8b, quoting the Hsien-tsung shih-lu (Veritable Record of the Emperor Hsien-tsung, now lost).



While assuming these new duties, Han Yü also kept his assignment in the Bureau of History. After Li Chi-fu died, Han Yü took the five chapter version of the Shun-tsung shih-lu to his home to make revisions and corrections, and then sometime in the summer of 815, on the twenty-ninth day of an unspecified month, he submitted it to the throne. The chief ministers felt that it contained errors, so Han Yü made further changes and resubmitted it.<sup>33</sup> Because Han Yü's version contained too many details about what went on within the palace, it was re-edited under later rulers. As a result of the many revisions of this history, doubts have been raised as to whether the version presently included in Han Yü's collected works is actually the one he wrote.<sup>34</sup>

A large part of the difficulty in producing an acceptable version of the Shun-tsung shih-lu derived from the fact that many of the participants in the events to be recorded were still alive, some of them in powerful positions. It could be dangerous to offend them (this may be why Li Chi-fu was so cautious about submitting it to the throne). Han Yü may have had these dangers in mind when he

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<sup>33</sup> HCLC, pp. 345-346, memorial on presenting the Shun-tsung shih-lu to the throne. The complete text of the shih-lu is in HCLC, pp. 403-424, translated by Solomon, Veritable Record.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Pulleyblank, "The Shun-tsung shih-lu."

replied to a letter of encouragement from a holder of the hsiu-ts'ai<sup>35</sup> degree named Liu K'o. He reminded his correspondent of the misfortunes that had befallen the great historians of the past who had tried to write history in such a way as to provide moral lessons for the guidance of future generations. Han Yü disclaimed any intention of seeking to emulate their example and contended that he was merely the holder of a sinecure granted to him by the chief minister.<sup>36</sup> In view of the time and effort that Han Yü appears to have expended on this history, one should probably not take his disclaimer too seriously, although it seems that Liu Tsung-yüan did, for he wrote a letter to Han Yü criticizing him for taking this attitude toward the writing of history.<sup>37</sup>

Ever since assuming the throne, Hsien-tsung had been taking steps to restore the authority of the court over the provinces.<sup>38</sup> He had enjoyed a good deal of success up to the time when he tried to reassert central authority over

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<sup>35</sup> The hsiu-ts'ai (blooming talent) degree was no longer offered in Han Yü's time, and the term was used as a synonym for chin-shih.

<sup>36</sup> HCLC, pp. 387-389. On Liu K'o, see E. G. Pulleyblank, "Liu K'o, a Forgotten Rival of Han Yü," Asia Major n.s., vol. 7, pts. 1-2 (1959), pp. 145-160.

<sup>37</sup> Liu Ho-tung chi, vol. 2, ch. 31, pp. 498-500.

<sup>38</sup> This is described in Peterson, "The Restoration Completed."

the province of Huai-hsi on the upper reaches of the Huai River in central China. Huai-hsi strongly resisted the imperial forces and was only subdued after a long and difficult campaign.<sup>39</sup>

Han Yü was among those who supported a policy of firm government action against the rebel province. He wrote a letter in the second month of 815 complimenting a civil official who had led troops against the rebel forces.<sup>40</sup>

Because the troops sent to put down the Huai-hsi rebellion had met with no success, in the fifth month Hsien-tsung sent the vice-president of the censorate P'ei Tu (765-839)<sup>41</sup> to investigate the situation. P'ei reported that the rebels could be defeated and the emperor was pleased. Han Yü also submitted his opinion and analysis of the situation, which was generally accurate, concluding that the defeat of the rebels was certain and the only thing lacking was the emperor's decision to press on to victory.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> This campaign is described by Charles A. Peterson, "Regional Defense Against the Central Power: The Huai-hsi Campaign, 815-817," in Frank A. Kierman, Jr., ed., Chinese Ways in Warfare (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), pp. 123-150.

<sup>40</sup> HCLC, pp. 130-131.

<sup>41</sup> Biographies in CTS 170, pp. 4413-4435; HTS 173, pp. 5209-5219.

<sup>42</sup> HCLC, pp. 371-375; cf. Peterson, "Regional Defense Against the Central Power," p. 139.

The high officials at court were divided as to whether to continue the war effort or to try to make peace with the rebels. In an apparent attempt to intimidate them, assassins attacked and killed the chief minister Wu Yüan-heng on the third day of the sixth month, at the same time wounding P'ei Tu. A reward was offered and seven days later eight suspects were arrested. On the twenty-fifth day of the month P'ei Tu was made a chief minister, and on the twenty-eighth six of those who had been arrested were executed along with fourteen others belonging to the same faction. When the court delayed paying the promised reward after the accused assassins were executed Han Yü, believing they were guilty, memorialized that the reward should be paid to show the court's good faith.<sup>43</sup> Lo Lien-t'ien notes that the chief minister Chang Hung-ching had expressed doubts to the emperor about the guilt of those executed (he was right), and suggests that although the emperor rejected Chang's arguments, perhaps he really agreed and therefore didn't pay the reward.<sup>44</sup>

On the fourteenth day of the first month of 816 Hsien-tsung demoted two officials to frighten others who opposed his war policies, thus creating a vacancy in the

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<sup>43</sup> HCLC, pp. 352-354.

<sup>44</sup> HYYC, p. 90; cf. TCTC 239, p. 7715, k'ao-yi (investigation of discrepancies).

Secretariat. On the twentieth day Han Yü was made one of the chief secretaries of the Secretariat (chung-shu she-jen). In the second month another chief secretary, Li Feng-chi, was made a chief minister. Li supported the policy of seeking peace with the rebels and the advocates of peace temporarily gained ascendancy at court. Lo thinks that this may be the reason that Han Yü was removed from his position in the Secretariat on the eighteenth day of the fifth month and appointed Mentor of the Right of the Heir Apparent (t'ai-tzu yu shu-tzu).<sup>45</sup> Although this was technically a promotion (from rank 5a to 4b), it effectively removed Han Yü from the arena where policy decisions were made.

The reign of the peace party did not last long. The emperor's loss of confidence in them began with the serious defeat of a loyalist military governor on the tenth day of the sixth month. Unlike previous losses in the Huai-hsi campaign, this one could not be covered up and when the emperor found out about it he rejected the advice of the peace advocates and thereafter listened only to P'ei Tu. Over the next few months the officials who favored peace were gradually demoted to lower ranking positions, mostly in the provinces. In the eleventh month Wang Ya (c. 760-835), who had received his chin-shih in the same year as Han Yü,

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<sup>45</sup> HYVC, pp. 90-91.

was made a chief minister.<sup>46</sup> Although there was supposed to be a special bond between same-year graduates of the chin-shih examination, Wang's views on the conduct of the war were opposed to Han Yü's and he eventually joined Li Feng-chi in urging the emperor to end the hostilities.

Despite their urging, the emperor still hoped for victory. As the T'ang armies had been unsuccessful in four years of campaigning against Huai-hsi, P'ei Tu asked permission to go and lead the troops himself. On the twenty-ninth day of the seventh month P'ei was made a special commissioner to coordinate the effort against Huai-hsi. He asked for a staff to accompany him, including Han Yü as superior administrator of the Army on Campaign (hsing-chün ssu-ma), the second ranking position on his staff.

Han Yü's duties included both assisting in the direction of the troops and overall responsibility for armaments and provisions and personnel records of the army.<sup>47</sup> He requested permission to leave early to go to Pien-chou to persuade the military governor Han Hung (765-822),<sup>48</sup> who still held the formal title of overall

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<sup>46</sup> Wang's biographies are in CTS 169, pp.4401-4405; HTS 179, pp. 5317-5319.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. des Rotours, Traite des Fonctionnaires, p. 654.

<sup>48</sup> Biographies in CTS 156, pp. 4134-4136; HTS 158, pp. 4944-4945.

military commander, to contribute troops to the general war effort. Perhaps because of Han Yü's persuasion, Han Hung did send his son to collect taxes to aid the imperial armies. Han Yü was still in Pien-chou when P'ei Tu left the capital in the eighth month and he wrote a poem sending off the mayor of Lo-yang who had been visiting in Pien-chou and who rushed back to Lo-yang to greet P'ei on his arrival there.<sup>49</sup> Lo Lien-t'ien interprets this as indicating that Han Yü's persuasion of Han Hung had already brought results.<sup>50</sup> Another poem that Han Yü wrote for P'ei Tu shows that he joined P'ei enroute after P'ei left Lo-yang.<sup>51</sup>

On the twenty-seventh day of the eighth month Han and P'ei reached Yen-ch'eng, the only rebel town captured by T'ang troops (because its commander defected), and dismissed the eunuch army supervisors, restoring the authority of the military commanders, whereupon military conditions improved. In the ninth month a surrendered Huai-hsi general told the T'ang general Li Su (773-821)<sup>52</sup> that the rebels' best troops had been moved to the border, leaving their capital inadequately defended. Han Yü learned of this and asked

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<sup>49</sup> HCLS, pp. 456-457.

<sup>50</sup> HYVC, p. 94.

<sup>51</sup> HCLS, p. 457.

<sup>52</sup> Biographies in CTS 133, pp. 3678-3682; HTS 154, pp. 4874-4878.

permission to lead an attack on the rebel capital and capture their leader, but P'ei Tu ignored the request, probably because he knew that Li Su had already made preparations for such an attack and was only waiting for a suitable opportunity.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, Li Su was a professional soldier, the son of a famous general, and Han Yü had no military experience. In the end, Han Yü remained in camp exchanging poems with his fellow civilian officials (including his only long linked verse since the death of Meng Chiao in 814)<sup>54</sup> while Li Su led the raid on the rebel capital.

The assault, which was prepared with the greatest secrecy, took place on the sixteenth day of the tenth month. The T'ang troops were victorious and P'ei Tu arrived on the twenty-fifth with an imperial amnesty and a promise of leniency for any rebel troops who wished to surrender.<sup>55</sup> P'ei Tu left his vice-commissioner to administer the rebel capital and departed for Ch'ang-an on the twenty-eighth day of the eleventh month accompanied by Han Yü, who was undoubtedly delighted with the results of his first military

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<sup>53</sup> Cf. Peterson, "Regional Defense Against the Central Power," p. 143; Li Ao, hsing-chuang, p. 24a; Huang-fu Shih, shen-tao pei, p. 11b.

<sup>54</sup> HCLS, pp. 458-468. Two of the shorter poems have been translated by Owen, Meng Chiao and Han Yü, pp. 280-281.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Peterson, "Regional Defense Against the Central Power," pp. 143-144; HCLC, pp. 274-280.



campaign. Han Yü wrote a number of poems along the way, including one of congratulations for P'ei Tu when they learned while still enroute that P'ei had been enfeoffed as Duke of Chin and made a Pillar of the State.<sup>56</sup>

They arrived in the capital in triumph on the sixteenth day of the twelfth month, and five days later Han Yü got his share of the reward for victory when he was appointed vice-minister of the Ministry of Justice (hsing-pu shih-lang). On the fourteenth day of the first month of 818, Han Yü was ordered to compose a memorial stele on the pacification of Huai-hsi. He proceeded to write it in the manner of the Book of Documents, following a tradition which made such inscriptions a celebration of the virtue of the ruler and the wisdom of his advisors as well as of the military accomplishments of his generals.<sup>57</sup> The completed text was submitted to the throne on the twenty-fifth day of the third month, but Li Su's wife, who was an imperial princess, complained that it gave too much credit to P'ei Tu and ignored her husband's contribution, while there were also errors in chronology. Han Yü's version was then

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<sup>56</sup> HCLS, pp. 469-474. Han Yü's poem congratulating P'ei is translated in Owen, Meng Chiao and Han Yü, p. 281.

<sup>57</sup> HCLC, pp. 274-280. See the discussion of this text by Diana Mei, Han Yü as a Ku-wen Stylist (diss.), pp. 76-93, and her translation, pp. 142-154.

rejected and another official was ordered to prepare a new version.

It is possible that Han YÜ's inexperience in military matters led him to underestimate the value of Li Su's work in preparing the ground for the final victory in Huai-hsi. After all, the war had been going on without success for nearly four years and Li Su had been there since the beginning of 817, whereas within two months of P'ei Tu's arrival victory had been attained. It may well have appeared to Han Yü that Li Su's attack was a relatively simple matter (since he thought he could have led it himself with no military training) and that it was P'ei Tu's presence that really made the difference.

Another consideration that may have influenced him was the desire to see in this event not merely a military victory on the part of the T'ang armies, but a symbolic victory of the civilian government over its rebellious military subordinates. If this were the case he would have had good reason to de-emphasize the role of the military, since it was the abuse of military power on the part of rebel generals ever since the rebellion of An Lu-shan which had created problems of this sort in the first place.

In the fourth month of 818 the military governor of Ch'eng-te (in present Hopei) sent his two sons to the court as hostages and returned two prefectures to court control.

According to two biographical sources, this was the result of a strategem suggested to Han Yü by the commoner Po Ch'i which Han Yü then transmitted to P'ei Tu.<sup>58</sup> This account is accepted by Ssu-ma Kuang, although Po Ch'i's biography in the Chiu T'ang Shu does not mention Han Yü's role in transmitting the idea to P'ei Tu, probably because he was only an intermediary whose contribution was limited to recognizing the value of Po Ch'i's suggestion.<sup>59</sup>

At the end of 818 Han Yü's position at court seemed secure and his future appeared to be bright. However, the beginning of the next year found him in circumstances where not only his career but even his life was in peril.

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<sup>58</sup> Huang-fu Shih, shen-tao pei, p. 11b; Li Ao, hsing-chuang, pp. 24a-b.

<sup>59</sup> TCTC 240, pp. 7748-7749; CTS 154, p. 4109.

THE AFFAIR OF THE BUDDHA'S BONE: 819 TO 820

In the Pagoda of a Buddhist temple in Feng-hsiang to the west of Ch'ang-an, there was a sacred relic which was said to be a finger bone of the original Buddha. The pagoda was opened every thirty years to display the relic, and it was believed that when this happened the harvest would be bountiful and the people would be at peace. The last time this had happened had been in 790 when Han Yü was in Ch'ang-an for the chin-shih examinations. Although he left the capital for a visit to his home sometime during this year, he probably waited for good weather before beginning his journey so that he would still have been in the city in the second month to see the popular reaction to the display of the famous relic.

Han Yü must have been deeply impressed by what he saw in 790 as the relic was first welcomed in the imperial palace, and then sent around to the various temples of the capital (which profitted greatly from the donations of the faithful who came to see the relic) before being returned to its home temple.<sup>1</sup> The same pattern was to be repeated in

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<sup>1</sup> There are brief descriptions of these events in CTS 13, p. 369, and TCTC 233, p. 7520.

819 as Hsien-taung sent eunuch commissioners to accompany the relic to the capital where it would lie in state in the palace for three days before being displayed in the Buddhist temples. Crowds of people of all classes from aristocrats to commoners besieged the temples, offering donations and worshipping the relic. Among them were some whose enthusiasm went so far that in making offerings they burned their heads and arms with incense and donated every bit of their property.<sup>2</sup>

Han Yü submitted a strongly worded memorial in which he stressed the non-Chinese origins of Buddhism, contrasting the long and happy reigns of the legendary sage kings in the period before the introduction of Buddhism with the short reigns and disorderly conditions of the Period of Disunion during which Buddhism became popular in China. He suggested that the founding emperor of the T'ang had thought of abolishing Buddhism, but regrettably had not done so. Now the present emperor is so wise that Han Yü cannot believe that he could really believe in Buddhism, and so he must have agreed to welcome the Buddha's bone simply to please the people. However, the people are not sophisticated enough to understand this, and they will think that the emperor is serious in his devotion to the Buddha. In their desire to emulate him they may behave irrationally even to

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<sup>2</sup> CTS 15, p. 466; TCTC 240, p. 7758.

the extent of doing serious harm to both themselves and the country. If the Buddha were a living man with his language and customs so incompatible with those of China, he would be treated politely as a guest, and then sent back to his own country so that he could not delude the Chinese people with his teachings. How is it then that long after his death his bones should be so honored by the court? Han Yü cites the saying of Confucius, "Respect the spirits, but keep them at a distance," and points out that in ancient times the rulers of states took great care to ward off the potentially harmful influence of spirits of the dead. Now the emperor shows no such caution and his officials have offered no remonstrance. Han Yü asks that the emperor should demonstrate his wisdom by ordering the Buddha's bone to be destroyed so that it can do no further harm in the future. If the Buddha really has the power to bring misfortune as a result of this, then let it fall upon Han Yü himself.<sup>3</sup>

Since Han Yü did not himself believe in Buddhism, perhaps he found it inconceivable that the emperor should and really believed that the emperor was only trying to please the people. It is unlikely that he would have

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<sup>3</sup> HCLC, pp. 354-356. This memorial will be translated in full in a later chapter. Other translations may be found in Birch, Anthology of Chinese Literature, pp. 250-253; de Bary, Sources of Chinese Tradition (partial translation), pp. 427-429; Liu, Chinese Classical Prose, pp. 45-49.

expressed himself as he did if he had known what the emperor's reaction would be.

When the emperor read Han Yü's memorial he became very angry and the next day sent it to the chief ministers, intending to order Han Yü's execution. However, the chief ministers P'ei Tu and Ts'ui Ch'ün interceded on Han's behalf. P'ei was Han Yü's friend and patron, while Ts'ui (772-832)<sup>4</sup> had received his chin-shih in the same year as Han Yü. They conceded that Han Yü had spoken disrespectfully and that such behavior ought to be considered a crime, but they argued that he would not have come to this situation had it not been for his feelings of loyalty and unwillingness to avoid his responsibility as an official. They respectfully requested that the emperor grant Han Yü a little mercy to ensure that others would continue to offer remonstrances. Hsien-tsung replied that he could forgive Han Yü's assertion that his patronage of Buddhism was excessive, but that Han's argument that rulers who patronized Buddhism after its introduction in the Eastern Han all died young one after another was perverse and could not be forgiven. Yet, there were many at court, even including members of the royal family, who felt that the punishment the emperor wished to inflict for Han's

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<sup>4</sup> Biographies in CTS 159, pp. 4187-4190; HTS 165, pp. 5080-5082.

transgression was too severe, and consequently the emperor relented and on the fourteenth day of the first month Han Yü was demoted to prefect of Ch'ao-chou (in Kwangtung) on the southern edge of the empire.<sup>5</sup>

When Han Yü received official notification of his demotion, he was required to set off for his place of exile immediately. His route can be traced by means of poems he wrote along the way. When he reached Lan-t'ien Pass (present Lan-t'ien hsien in Shensi) while crossing the Ch'in-ling mountains, he wrote a poem to his nephew Hsiang (Lao-ch'eng's son) who had come from a distance to accompany him.<sup>6</sup>

After leaving Lan-t'ien, Han Yü proceeded to Shang-lo (present Shang hsien in Shensi) and then went east toward Wu Pass. On the way he met a Tibetan exile from Turfan and wrote a poem comforting the barbarian with the thought that his place of exile was not so far that he need worry about preserving his life, whereas Han Yü's place of exile was 8000 li from the capital and he had no hope of returning.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> CTS 160, p. 4200.

<sup>6</sup> HCLS pp. 484-487; tr. Owen, Meng Chiao and Han Yü, p. 282, and Hartman, Sunflower Splendor, p. 190.

<sup>7</sup> HCLS, p. 487.



At the border of Teng-chou (in Honan), he wrote another poem referring to his family whom he had left behind in Ch'ang-an and also to Wang Shih-tao, the military governor of P'ing-lu (in Shantung), who was defeated in the first month and executed on the fourth day of the second month, thus dating this poem to the first month.<sup>8</sup> Another poem indicates that he continued to the east, passing through Nan-yang, and then turned toward the south probably entering the Han River valley near Hsiang-yang.<sup>9</sup>

As soon as Han Yü had left Ch'ang-an, "someone in authority" decided that the family of a banished person should not remain in the capital and they were ordered to follow Han Yü to Ch'ao-chou. At that time his fourth daughter, Nü, was sick in bed, but she still had to travel, carried in a sedan chair. On the second day of the second month, frightened and in pain and unable to hold down either food or drink, she died at the Ts'eng-feng courier station at Shang-nan and was buried at the foot of a hill south of the station.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> HCLS, p. 488.

<sup>9</sup> HCLS, pp. 488-489.

<sup>10</sup> HCLC, p. 199 (sacrificial prayer for his daughter), p. 323 (tomb inscription for his daughter). HCLS, p. 529 (poem of regret on passing his daughter's grave), tr. by Owen, Meng Chiao and Han Yü, p. 284.

By this time Han Yü had already reached Yi-ch'eng hsien (in Hupei) where he inscribed a poem on the temple of King Chao of Ch'u<sup>11</sup> and a prose inscription for his nephew Hsiang (some critics think Hsiang wrote it) on the courier station at Yi-ch'eng dated the day his daughter died.<sup>12</sup>

On the fifteenth day of the third month he went down the Wu River to Ch'ü-chiang (in Kwangtung), passing through the Ch'ang-lo rapids where he wrote a poem, "The Officer at the Rapids," in which he states that he has been traveling south for more than sixty days. He has the officer state the distance yet to be traveled as 3000 li and has him describe the unpleasant conditions to be expected in the province of Ling-nan in general and Ch'ao-chou in particular, which is described as a place where good officials are never sent--only criminals and exiles.<sup>13</sup> Lo Lien-t'ien notes that since Han Yü left Ch'ang-an on the fourteenth day of the first month, this poem was probably written on the fifteenth or sixteenth day of the third month.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> HCLS, pp. 489-490; tr. Owen, p. 283.

<sup>12</sup> HCLC, pp. 397-398.

<sup>13</sup> HCLS, pp. 490-494; tr. Hartman, Sunflower Splendor, pp. 188-189.

<sup>14</sup> HYYC, p. 103.

Continuing to the south, he paused at the mouth of the Shih-hsing river to write a poem expressing his feelings. He recalls how he had followed his brother to Shao-chou some forty years earlier and reflects that of those who made that previous trip south he is the only one still alive and although there are now one hundred (here again probably meaning "many") people following him, there is no one with whom he can discuss such old matters.<sup>15</sup> Lo Lien-t'ien thinks that the reference to those following him probably means that his family had caught up with him by this time.<sup>16</sup>

Upon the recommendation of Liu Tsung-yüan, the civil governor of Kuei-lin, P'ei Hsing-li, sent one of his assistants to accompany Han Yü part of the way.<sup>17</sup> Lo Lien-t'ien estimates that Han YÜ probably arrived in Kuang-chou (Canton) on approximately the twenty-fifth day of the third month, assuming that he left Shao-chou (Ch'ü-chiang) on the fifteenth or sixteenth and traveled at about the same rate of speed as Li Ao in 809 (as recorded in Li's Lai-nan lu, cited above).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> HCLS, p. 496.

<sup>16</sup> HYVC, pp. 103-104.

<sup>17</sup> HCLS, pp. 496-500 (poems given to the assistant to take back to Kuei-chou).

<sup>18</sup> HYVC, p. 104.

From Kuang-chou he proceeded eastward passing through Tseng-ch'eng and Hui-chou and finally reached Ch'ao-chou on the twenty-fifth day of the fourth month.<sup>19</sup> As soon as Han Yü reached Ch'ao-chou, he sent a memorial to the emperor thanking him for the appointment and praising the emperor's good government.<sup>20</sup>

It is in this memorial that he gives the date of his departure from Ch'ang-an and says that he had to leave the same day he got the appointment. He refers to Ch'ao-chou as being 10,000 li from the capital and 2,000 li from Kuang-chou on the extreme eastern edge of the province. A round trip to and from Kuang-chou takes a month. The environment is unpleasant with crocodiles and poisonous vapors, etc. When Han Yü was young he was often ill, and now he is in his fifties with white hair and falling teeth. He cannot expect to survive long in these surroundings. He is all alone in this barbaric land with no faction at court to intervene on his behalf. If the emperor does not condescend to remember him, who will be willing to speak for him? He pleads that he is by nature ignorant and there are many things in human affairs that he does not understand, but he is very fond of learning and literature. He praises

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<sup>19</sup> Hung Hsing-tsu's nien-p'u dates this to the third month, but Lo cites Sung and Ch'ing critics to show that this is wrong. HYYC, pp. 104-105.

<sup>20</sup> HCLC, pp. 356-358.

the emperor and the T'ang dynasty, but takes note of the troubles of the last sixty or seventy years. He then praises the way Hsien-tsung has dealt with these problems, comparing him favorably with the founding emperors Kao-tsung and T'ai-tsung and suggesting that his accomplishments make him worthy to go to T'ai-shan to perform the Feng and Shan sacrifices. He expresses his gratitude for the emperor's mercy and pledges to give his all to repay the emperor's favor.<sup>21</sup>

Han Yü's biography says that when the emperor received this memorial, he said to the chief ministers, "The affair of Han Yü's remonstrance regarding the Buddha's bone was for the most part due to his love for me. How could I not know it? Even so, as my minister he should not have said that if a ruler serves the Buddha his years will go by quickly (and soon be ended)." He wanted to employ Han Yü again, so he discussed the matter with his chief ministers to see if they agreed, but Huang-fu Po (c. 755-820),<sup>22</sup> who was an enemy of Han Yü's patron P'ei Tu, argued that "Yü is entirely too wild and reckless (to be brought back to the capital), but we could transfer him to another commandery." Although P'ei Tu still held the rank of chief minister, he

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<sup>21</sup> HCLC, pp. 356-358.

<sup>22</sup> Biographies in CTS 135, pp. 3738-3743; HTS 167, pp. 5113-5114.

had left the court in the fourth month to become military governor of Ho-tung after losing a struggle for power with Huang-fu Po, so he was not in a position to help Han Yü.<sup>23</sup>

An amnesty was announced in the seventh month and it was supposedly because of this and his memorial to the emperor that Han Yü's post was changed as of the twenty-fourth day of the tenth month to prefect of Yüan-chou (present Yi-ch'un on the Yüan River in west central Kiangsi).

Although Han Yü administered Ch'ao-chou for less than a year, his achievements as an administrator have been praised. The most unusual accomplishment which was claimed for him was driving away the crocodiles. His official biography states that when he arrived in Ch'ao-chou, Han Yü asked the local officials and people about their urgent problems, and they all said that there were crocodiles that grew to several tens of feet and which ate nearly all of their young animals, thereby causing them to be poor. Several days later Han Yü went to observe the crocodiles, and ordered his executive officer Ch'in Chi to roast a young pig and a sheep and throw them into the Chiu River west of the prefectural capital along with a prayer cast in the form of a Buddhist or Taoist prayer of exorcism (one presumes

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<sup>23</sup> CTS 160, p. 4202; cf. The Cambridge History of China, pp. 632-633.

that he considered this the appropriate form for such a prayer).<sup>24</sup> In the prayer Han Yü implies that the presence of these harmful creatures within the boundaries of the empire is due to the insufficient virtue of the rulers of historical times as opposed to that of the sage rulers of antiquity who were able to remove all evil influences from their realms. He tells the crocodiles (and his readers) that the present ruler has virtuous qualities (which invite comparison with those ancient sages) and proclaims that as the representative of the emperor he cannot permit them to remain in the land it is his duty to protect. He uses his authority as the emperor's representative to scold the crocodiles for their misbehavior and orders them to leave with all their kin within seven days or he will order skilled bowmen with poisoned arrows to kill them. Han Yü's biography records that on the evening of the day the prayer was offered there arose in the midst of the Chiu River a violent wind and thunder, and in a few days the river was completely dry as it moved to a new course sixty li to the west. It is further stated that from this time onward the people of Ch'ao-chou had no further trouble with crocodiles.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> HCLC, pp. 329-331; tr. Spring, Tang Guwen, pp. 159-161. On the exorcistic style of this text, see Mei (diss.), p. 16.

<sup>25</sup> CTS 160, pp. 4202-4203; HTS 176, pp. 5262-5263.

It seems unlikely that Han Yü seriously believed that his prayer would drive the crocodiles away, and therefore Madeline Spring has suggested that this prayer was intended, like his memorial of thanks to the emperor for appointing him to Ch'ao-chou (where he certainly did not want to go), to remind the emperor of his presence and his loyalty despite his exile to this uncivilized post in the hope that the emperor would recognize his continued value as an official and appoint him to a more desirable position.<sup>26</sup>

Lo Lien-t'ien accepts that the crocodiles were there and did disappear, but he suspects that Han Yü made good on his threat to send skilled bowmen with poisoned arrows to kill them. Lo Lien-t'ien accounts for the wonders described in the biographies by guessing that a popular legend of the time was simply copied into Han Yü's biographies without any investigation of the facts.<sup>27</sup> Something of this sort seems likely, as the more fantastic elements of this tale do have the flavor of a popular "tale of wonders" (ch'uan-ch'i).

Another accomplishment with which Han Yü is credited during his term of office in Ch'ao-chou is the freeing of persons who had fallen into slavery as a result of the non-payment of debts for which they were security. As Lo Lien-t'ien notes, Han Yü was probably following the example

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<sup>26</sup> Spring, Tang Guwen, pp. 164-169.

<sup>27</sup> HYYC, p. 106.



of Liu Tsung-yüan, who had done the same thing after his transfer to Liu-chou in 815, as recorded in Han Yü's funeral inscription for him (Liu died in the eleventh month of 819 after asking Han Yü to look after his family for him). Like Liu, Han Yü calculated the value of the service rendered by the slaves in order to declare the debts paid and return them to their families.<sup>28</sup>

Han Yü is also given credit for the establishment of local schools in Ch'ao-chou. While there, he sent a memorial to the emperor explaining the need for a school and outlining his proposal for establishing one.<sup>29</sup> In the memorial he cites Confucius on education to make the point that it is better to lead the people with virtue and propriety rather than relying solely on rules and punishments, and then argues that leading the people as Confucius advises requires schools and teachers. It is the shame of this hsien that for a long time it has had no schools and for more than a hundred years it has sent no candidates to the chin-shih or ming-ching examinations, while the local people have never witnessed the performance of the Confucian rites nor heard the ceremonial music used

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<sup>28</sup> Huang-fu Shih, shen-tao pei, p. 12a; Li Ao, hsing-chuang, p. 24b (here this action takes place in Yüan-chou). The inscription for Liu Tsung-yüan is in HCLC, pp. 294-297; tr. Liu, Chinese Classical Prose, pp. 91-97.

<sup>29</sup> HCLC, pp. 401-402.

to recognize accomplishment in education; neither does anyone exhort them to loyal and filial behavior. Han Yü quotes a line from the Analects of Confucius which asserts that even a village of ten houses must have someone who is loyal and faithful,<sup>30</sup> and then points out that this prefecture has more than 10,000 households, so how can it not have someone who is worthy? The prefect (Han Yü) and the magistrate cannot personally act as their teachers, so the village youth have no one with whom to study. Han Yü then proposes a candidate for the job: the holder of the hsiu-ts'ai (chin-shih) degree Chao Te is deeply refined and devoted to tranquillity. He has some knowledge of the classics, he is able to compose literature, and he is able to understand the ways of the former kings. It is said that he rejects unorthodox teachings and honors the Confucians. He can be made a teacher. Han Yü therefore proposes to change Chao's title from chief of employees (wei) of Hai-yang to deputy judge of military affairs (ya t'ui-kuan) with the exclusive duty of managing the prefecture's education. In this way he can supervise the students and a good custom will be established. Han Yü will contribute from his own salary a hundred or a thousand to raise capital for this enterprise (apparently he has asked for

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<sup>30</sup> Lun-yü, 5:27; tr. James Legge, The Chinese Classics, 7 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1895), vol. 1, p. 183.

contributions). If there is a surplus it will be used to provide food for the students.

Su Shih's (1037-1101) stele inscription for the temple to Han Yü at Ch'ao-chou mentions this incident, and adds that from this time on the gentlemen of Ch'ao-chou were all serious about civilized behavior, and (this attitude) extended to the common people, so that up to the present time (the eleventh century) it has been praised as a place that is easy to administer.<sup>31</sup> An incident that occurred at Ch'ao-chou requires mention because some critics have interpreted it as casting doubt on the sincerity of the sentiments which Han Yü expressed in his "Memorial on the Buddha's Bone". There are three letters which Han Yü is supposed to have written to a Ch'an monk named Ta-tien.<sup>32</sup> These letters have been a source of controversy ever since the Sung dynasty. Some of the most eminent writers of the Sung held conflicting opinions as to their authenticity. Ou-yang Hsiu (1007-1072) thought they were genuine; Su Shih emphatically disagreed. Chu Hsi (1130-1200) also thought

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<sup>31</sup> Su Shih, Ching-chin Tung-p'o wen-chi shih-lüeh (Collected Prose of Su Tung-p'o (Su Shih) with Annotations) (c. 1173; Taipei: Shih-chieh shu-chü, 1975), ch. 55, pp. 877-881.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Lo Hsiang-lin, T'ang-tai wen-hua shih, pp. 177-193.

they were genuine, but Lu Yu (1125-1210) suspected that they had been forged by a crafty monk.<sup>33</sup>

The extent to which this issue provoked controversy reflects the image which had enveloped Han Yü as a pure Confucian who would never deign to associate with anyone less purely devoted to Confucianism than himself. There is no doubt that Han Yü knew Ta-tien, for he mentions it himself in a letter to his friend Meng Chien in which he refers to the accusation that he has recently begun to believe in Buddhism. He denies the charge and explains that Ch'ao-chou was in a distant place and there was no one for him to talk to. There was an old monk named Ta-tien who was rather intelligent, so Han Yü summoned him from his mountain retreat and detained him in the prefectural capital for more than ten days. Han Yü describes the monk in what were probably the terms that Ta-tien's disciples used to describe him to Han Yü, saying that he was able to ignore his body, use reason to overcome himself, and to remain undisturbed by phenomena. Han Yü admits that he did not understand all that Ta-tien had to say, but their relations were cordial. When Han Yü left for Yüan-chou he gave Ta-tien some clothing as a parting gift, simply as a gesture of human feelings,

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<sup>33</sup> Their differing opinions have been collected by the modern scholar Ch'ien Chung-shu in his T'an-yi lu (Record of Talks on the Arts) (Taipei?: Yeh-hu ch'u-pan she, n.p., n.d.), pp. 74-82.

not because he believes in the monk's "dharma" or seeks some good luck or personal profit.<sup>34</sup>

There is nothing in the three letters that contradicts this explanation of the relationship between Han Yü and Ta-tien as merely one of friendship in which Han Yü occasionally borrowed some Buddhist terminology to refer to his correspondent in an appropriately courteous manner. Regardless of what his later admirers might have thought, Han Yü seems to have seen no contradiction in dealing with Buddhists and Taoists as individuals while opposing their teachings in general.

Although Han Yü's appointment to Yüan-chou was made at the end of the tenth month, he probably did not learn of it until the twelfth month. The prefect of Shao-chou congratulated him with a poem and Han Yü reciprocated with a poem of his own.<sup>35</sup> Han Yü would have liked to take Chao Te with him to Yüan-chou, but Chao couldn't go, so Han Yü wrote a poem to mark their parting.<sup>36</sup>

The trip to Yüan-chou was less hurried than the journey to Ch'ao-chou had been and Han Yü took advantage of the opportunity to see the sights along the way. Before setting out, he wrote to the prefect of Shao-chou in the

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<sup>34</sup> HCLC, pp. 124-126; HYYC, pp. 108-109.

<sup>35</sup> HCLS, pp. 518-519.

<sup>36</sup> HCLS, pp. 519-520.

first month of 820, sending him a poem asking for maps of the area he would be passing through.<sup>37</sup>

Han Yü arrived in Yüan-chou on the eighth day of the intercalary first month of 820 and shortly afterward sent a memorial thanking the emperor for his appointment. This memorial is brief and formal, in contrast to the one he had sent thanking the emperor for his appointment to Ch'ao-chou.<sup>38</sup> Lo Lien-t'ien notes that in this memorial Han Yü refers to the "former reign" so he had apparently already heard the news of Hsien-tsung's death on the twenty-sixth day of the first month and Mu-tsung's accession on the third day of the intercalary first month. Lo therefore concludes that the memorial probably dates from the end of the intercalary first month.<sup>39</sup>

On the fifth day of the second month a general amnesty was proclaimed for the empire. Han Yü sent congratulations on this and on the accession of the new emperor.<sup>40</sup> On the sixteenth day of the sixth month between the hours of three and five in the afternoon, five-colored auspicious clouds appeared in the northwest and Han Yü took it as an omen of the coming of a period of great peace

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<sup>37</sup> HCLS, p. 521.

<sup>38</sup> HCLC, p. 360.

<sup>39</sup> HYYC, p. 110.

<sup>40</sup> HCLC, pp. 360-361.

(t'ai-p'ing) and wrote to congratulate the emperor on the appearance of such an auspicious omen.<sup>41</sup> The memorial also served to remind the new emperor of Han Yü's existence and of his availability for service at the capital.

Compared to the relatively extensive records of Han Yü's service at Ch'ao-chou, little is known about the time he spent in Yüan-chou. One source says only that his administration of Yüan-chou was like his administration of Ch'ao-chou.<sup>42</sup> Again he found men and women being used as security for debts and falling into slavery when the debts were not repaid according to the terms of the contract. He established a method for redeeming the debt-slaves and eliminated this custom, no longer permitting such slavery.<sup>43</sup>

The recall to the capital he had been hoping for finally came with his appointment as Chancellor of the National University (kuo-tzu chi-chiu) on the twenty-second day of the ninth month of 820. He learned of his promotion sometime during the tenth month, for in his "Record of Renovating the Pavilion of the King of T'eng" dated the fifth day of the tenth month, he still refers to himself as the prefect of Yüan-chou,<sup>44</sup> while in his "Sacrificial Prayer

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<sup>41</sup> HCLC, pp. 362-363.

<sup>42</sup> Huang-fu Shih, shen-tao pei, p. 12a.

<sup>43</sup> CTS 160, p. 4203.

<sup>44</sup> HCLC, pp. 53-54.

for the Goddesses of the Hsiang River" which was written on an unspecified day of the tenth month, he identifies himself by his new title.<sup>45</sup>

As usual, the course of his journey back to Ch'ang-an can be traced in the poems he composed at different points along the way.<sup>46</sup> When he reached Chiang-chou (present Chiu-chiang in Kiangsi), he visited the Hsi-lin temple at Lu-shan where Hsiao Ts'un, the son of the famous ku-wen writer Hsiao Ying-shih, had retired after resigning from government service in disgust because of the evil behavior of P'ei Yen-ling (728-796), the official who had brought about the fall of Lu Chih in 795.<sup>47</sup> At this time Hsiao Ts'un had already died and all that remained of his family was a daughter who had become a nun. However, in his youth Hsiao had been friendly with both Han Hui and Liang Su, and it is possible that Han Yü had met him at that time. Han Yü paused to inscribe a poem on Hsiao's former residence.<sup>48</sup>

From Chiang-chou Han Yü traveled up the Yangtze River by boat, passing through Wu-ch'ang, then left the Yangtze and turned toward the northwest and in the twelfth

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<sup>45</sup> HCLC, pp. 188-189.

<sup>46</sup> HCLS, pp. 524-530.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Twitchett, "Lu Chih," pp. 119-120.

<sup>48</sup> HCLS, pp. 525-526; HYYC, pp. 113-114.



month reached An-lu (in Hupei) where he wrote two poems to send to Chou Chün-ch'ao, the prefect of Sui-chou. In the second poem Han Yü notes that of the men who served Tung Chin many years ago he and Chou are the only ones still alive. He refers to Chou's interest in Taoist elixirs of long life (Liu Tsung-yüan also mentioned this in a letter to Chou)<sup>49</sup> and asks for a small amount of it to save his sick body.<sup>50</sup> A Sung commentator quoted in the notes to this poem takes this as proof that Han Yü took Taoist elixirs, but this is rather weak "proof" since it would be normal in such a poem to humor the eccentricities of the recipient without ever expecting such a request to be taken seriously. There is a possibility, however, that the "sick body" Han Yü refers to in his poem reflects a recurrence of the malaria that he had contracted during his previous exile in 805 and that his request to Chou was made in the hope of obtaining medications to treat his illness. There was a traditional association in China between Taoist alchemy and the practice of medicine.

When he reached Hsiang-yang on the Han River, Han Yü was lavishly entertained by the military governor of Shan-nan East province, the former chief minister Li Feng-chi. Han Yü responded with a poem reflecting the

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<sup>49</sup> Liu Ho-tung chi, vol. 2, ch. 32, pp. 518-520.

<sup>50</sup> HCLS, pp. 526-527.

cordial relations between them even though they had not been good friends when they served together in the capital and had been on opposite sides regarding the issue of whether to send troops to subdue Huai-hsi.<sup>51</sup>

In the twelfth month he passed by the grave of his fourth daughter who had died on the journey south and wrote a poem to be inscribed on the roof beam of the courier station where she died.<sup>52</sup> In 823 when he was mayor of Ch'ang-an he returned her body to Ho-yang for reburial and at that time composed a sacrificial prayer and a tomb inscription for her.<sup>53</sup>

When Han Yü arrived in the capital later in the twelfth month, an issue before the court was what to do about a group of barbarians who had been bothering the southern administration of Yung (in Kwangsi) sporadically ever since 795. The current commissioner in charge of the area had submitted a petition requesting their suppression. Since Han Yü had just come from the south, he felt quite familiar with matters in that area and consequently sent up a memorial discussing the appropriate handling of what he

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<sup>51</sup> HCLS, pp. 528-529.

<sup>52</sup> HCLS, pp. 529-530; tr. Owen, Meng Chiao and Han Yü, p. 284.

<sup>53</sup> HCLC, pp. 199-200, 323.

referred to as the "Huang family bandits" because their leaders had all come from the same Huang family.

Han Yü suggested that part of the problem was that the officials appointed to Yung-chou had not been suited to the job. He proposed that the administrations of Yung and its neighbor to the east, Jung, should be combined into a single province (tao) with its governor (ching-lueh shih) stationed at Yung-chou so the barbarians would be less likely to attack and easier to repel and control if they did. Troops should be recruited locally so they would know the terrain (and the nature of the enemy). Such troops would be easier to train and more effective at no additional cost. After the area is pacified, treat the bandits' followers well and forgive them so others will surrender willingly.<sup>54</sup>

Recalling another problem he had encountered in the south, Han Yü also submitted a memorial discussing the mortgaging of free people and requesting an order to all officials to free in accordance with the law (Hsien-tsung had already outlawed this practice in 809)<sup>55</sup> all those

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<sup>54</sup> HCLC, pp. 369-371.

<sup>55</sup> TCTC 237, pp. 7657-7658.

persons throughout the empire who had been so mortgaged and enslaved.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> HCLC, p. 371; tr. Liu, Chinese classical Prose, p. 53.

## LIFE AS A HIGH OFFICIAL: 821 TO 824

Han Yü's return to Ch'ang-an from Yüan-chou marked the end of his last period of exile. For the remaining four years of his life he held a succession of high posts in the capital. Although his life in these last years was not entirely free from controversy he did not suffer any further serious setbacks of the kind that had interrupted his official advancement in the past.

As director of the National University Han Yü found that conditions within the University were not in accord with the provisions set down in the T'ang liu-tien. He submitted a memorial citing the number and rank of the students who were to be admitted to the three divisions of the National University and contrasted this with actual present conditions. He noted that some of the sons and grandsons of the nobility and high officials whose rank entitled them to enter the University were ashamed to do so while some of the places they should have occupied were held by merchants and commoners.<sup>1</sup>

Han Yü does not state the number of students currently enrolled in the National University, but it was

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<sup>1</sup> HCLC, p. 339.

probably not greater than the quota established for each branch of the University in the year 807 as recorded in the Hsin T'ang Shu. According to the quota set in this year there were to be only eighty students in the School of the Sons of the State which was reserved for the sons and grandsons of civil and military officials of the third and higher ranks and members of the highest nobility. According to the T'ang liu-tien there should have been three hundred. The situation was similar in the other two schools of the University. In the t'ai-hsüeh (also translated as "National University") for sons and grandsons of officials of the fifth and higher ranks there were to be seventy students where formerly there should have been three hundred. At the School of the Four Gates for the sons of officials of the seventh rank and above there were to be three hundred students instead of five hundred.<sup>2</sup>

It was therefore presumably to bring the enrollment in the University back up to its earlier quota that Han Yü proposed extending eligibility for entry into the t'ai-hsüeh to the sons and younger brothers of regular officials of the eighth rank and above, while the School of the Four Gates should accept talented students who lacked the yin privilege to fill its quota of students. An indication of

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<sup>2</sup> HTS 44, p. 1165; tr. des Rotours, Traite des Examens, pp. 179-180.

the number of students who were either enrolled or anticipated for the year 821 is Han Yü's request for a rice ration for 274 persons. If the quotas set in 807 had been completely filled there should have been 450 students.<sup>3</sup>

In another memorial Han Yü further requested that the Board of Personnel should not make teaching appointments to the National University based only on seniority, but that new appointees should come only from among those who had mastered the classics and histories and obtained the chin-shih degree.<sup>4</sup> In a separate letter, Han Yü recommended his friend Chang Chi as one who was qualified to fill a vacancy for a professorship at the University.<sup>5</sup>

Han Yü's "Account of Conduct" also notes that he asked for the appointment of Confucians as officials of the University and caused the students to meet daily to hear lectures. Many students came to hear the lectures and all were happy, saying to each other, "Since Lord Han has been Libationer the University is not lonely." The same source records an incident concerning a lecturer who was able to discourse on rites, but had a vulgar appearance so that many other school officials who came from elite families rejected him and wouldn't eat with him. Han Yü therefore invited the

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<sup>3</sup> HCLC, pp. 339-340.

<sup>4</sup> HCLC, p. 369.

<sup>5</sup> HCLC, p. 364.

lecturer to eat with him and thereafter the other officials did not dare slight him.<sup>6</sup>

On the twenty-sixth day of the seventh month of 821 Han Yü was transferred to the position of vice-president of the Board of War (ping-pu shih-lang). Two days after Han Yü's appointment T'ien Hung-cheng, the military governor of Ch'eng-te (in Hopei), was killed along with more than 300 of his relatives and followers by Wang T'ing-tsou (d. 834)<sup>7</sup> who then called himself the "acting governor" (liu-shou) and compelled the eunuch army supervisor to seek the insignia of office for him which would signify official recognition of his status by the court. The court was unwilling to grant such recognition and on the fourteenth day of the eighth month ordered armies from five neighboring provinces to the borders of Ch'eng-te. A plot to overthrow Wang led by one of his own generals was discovered and suppressed with much loss of life, while the first attempt by government troops led by Niu Yüan-yi, the prefect of Shen-chou, to move against him also failed as Wang's forces surrounded his opponent's headquarters on the thirtieth day of the eighth month. Probably with the victorious campaign against Huai-hsi in mind, on the third day of the tenth month the

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<sup>6</sup> Li Ao, hsing-chuang, pp. 24b-25a.

<sup>7</sup> Biographies in CTS 142, pp. 3884-3888; HTS 211, pp. 5959-5961.



court appointed P'ei Tu commissioner in charge of expeditionary forces on all sides of the Ch'eng-te capital of Chen-chou (present Cheng-ting in Hopei). On the fourteenth day P'ei personally led troops to attack Wang's position from the west.

Despite P'ei's leadership, the government forces were not successful. By the first month of 822 the imperial armies were attacking Wang's forces from the west, east and north in an attempt to relieve the siege of Shen-chou, but their advance was limited by lack of supplies. In the meantime the condition of Shen-chou was increasingly critical and finally the court had no choice but to grant Wang the formal title of military governor on the second day of the second month. Han Yü was appointed commissioner to inform Wang of the court's decision and to soothe his ruffled feelings (hsüan-wei shih). The ineffective prefect of Shen-chou, who had been given the title of military governor when he was ordered to lead troops against Wang, was given a new appointment in the south but was unable to leave because Wang still refused to open the encirclement of Shen-chou.<sup>8</sup>

When Han Yü was about to depart for Chen-chou everyone felt that he would be in danger and Yüan Chen (779-

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<sup>8</sup> TCTC 242, pp. 7796-7808.

831),<sup>9</sup> who opposed P'ei Tu and the use of military force against Ch'eng-te and who became a chief minister in the second month of 822, is reported to have said, "Han Yü is pitiable." Mu-tsung also regretted making the appointment and instructed Han Yü to go to the border of the war zone to observe the situation, but not to enter very far. Han Yü replied, "To stop (without completing my mission) would be due to my lord's benevolence, but to die (if necessary in the service of one's lord) is a minister's duty. How could I receive my lord's command and yet stand still out of concern for myself?"<sup>10</sup> He thereupon set off immediately, arriving in T'ai-yüan on the fifteenth of the second month. He then turned toward the east, travelling quickly despite the cold weather.<sup>11</sup>

Li Ao and Huang-fu Shih give the following account of Han Yü's experience in Chen-chou. When Han Yü arrived in Chen-chou, Wang had troops in armor arrayed around his headquarters. Han Yü spoke loudly asking why Wang wanted to rebel like a bandit when the emperor had granted him the title of military governor? A soldier stepped forward and

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<sup>9</sup> Biographies in Angela Jung Palandri, Yüan Chen (New York: Twayne, 1977), pp. 20-30; CTS 166, pp. 4327-4339; HTS 174, pp. 5223-5229.

<sup>10</sup> Li Ao, hsing-chuang, p. 25a; Huang-fu Shih, mu-chih ming, p. 15b.

<sup>11</sup> HCLS, p.547, poem for P'ei Tu.

protested that this army had shed blood in the past to defend the court, so now how could they be considered bandits? Han Yü replied that they seemed to have forgotten their former leader who was loyal to the throne. If they still remembered that was good, but that was in the past. He recited the names of rebel leaders who had been defeated and asked what was their fate? Do they have descendants? He then contrasted these with others who had submitted to the court and held high ranks and powerful positions which they were able to pass on to their descendants. The soldiers protested that they were justified in killing T'ien Hung-cheng because he treated them cruelly, but Han Yü replied that by killing T'ien and all his retinue they were following the way of the rebels with the bad fate which that implied. The soldiers were impressed by Han Yü's argument and Wang feared that he might win them over, so finally agreed to end the siege. Han Yü was treated well and allowed to leave with no difficulty.<sup>12</sup>

This account of the incident gives Han Yü credit for obtaining the release of Niu Yüan-yi from Shen-chou, but both Wang's biography in the Chiu T'ang Shu and the Tzu-chih t'ung-chien say that Niu escaped later on his own, and that when the general left in charge in Shen-chou finally

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<sup>12</sup> Li Ao, hsing-chuang, pp. 25a-26a; Huang-fu Shih, mu-chih ming, p. 15b.

surrendered to Wang he was killed along with more than 180 others, including those members of Niu's family who had been unable to escape.<sup>13</sup> Lo Lien-t'ien concludes that it is probably the latter two sources that are correct.<sup>14</sup>

It is quite possible that Wang T'ing-tsou deliberately misled Han Yü about his intentions toward Shen-chou and that Han Yü left Chen-chou believing that he had brought the matter to a successful conclusion. He had no way of knowing what the future would bring. As it turned out, Wang and his descendants continued to rule Ch'eng-te for eighty-six years.<sup>15</sup>

On his way back from Chen-chou Han Yü wrote a poem that later became a source of controversy because its references to willows and peach trees were interpreted by some critics of the Sung and later as romantic allusions to two concubines named Crimson Peach (Chiang-t'ao) and Willow Branch (Liu-chih). According to a story in the T'ang Yü-lin (Forest of Anecdotes from the T'ang),<sup>16</sup> both of these concubines were able to sing and dance. A poem Han Yü wrote at Shou-yang station (170 li east of T'ai-yüan) on the way

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13 CTS 142, p. 3887; TCTC 242, p. 7813.

14 HYYC, p. 122.

15 The Cambridge History of China, p. 547.

16 Wang T'ang, ed., T'ang yü-lin (c. 1100; Taipei: Shih-chieh shu-chü, 1975), p. 220.

to Chen-chou mentions not seeing garden flowers (yüan-hua) or lane willows (hsiang-liu) and this has been taken as a reference to these two concubines.<sup>17</sup> The story says that after this poem was written Willow Branch "went over the wall and escaped" but members of the household pursued and caught her. Thus the second poem, written when Han Yü was returning from Chen-chou, refers to willows that want to fly in the spring wind while blossoms of peach and plum trees still remain in the small garden awaiting his return.<sup>18</sup> The story concludes by saying that after this he exclusively favored Crimson Peach.

Some critics of later times have refused to believe this story because they considered such sentiments unworthy of a great man like Han Yü, and they found precedents in the Shih Ching for the use of terminology such as appears in Han Yü's poem in an acceptable Confucian sense. This attitude reflects an extreme form of Neo-Confucianism which eventually engendered a reaction in the late Ming and Ch'ing periods to what many scholars saw as an unnecessary denial of human feelings. Wang Ming-sheng, for example, thought that the language of the poem was better suited to the expression of personal feelings than to a nature poem on the scenery of Han Yü's garden, but given such strong evidence

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<sup>17</sup> HCLS, p.546.

<sup>18</sup> HCLS, p. 547.

of his bravery and honesty how could such sentiments harm his reputation as a great man?<sup>19</sup>

Concerning the reliability of this story, we might note that the T'ang yü-lin was compiled circa 1100 and that the only contemporary reference to these women appears to be Chang Chi's sacrificial poem for Han Yü which mentions that two or three months before his death during his final illness Han Yü liked to listen to two unnamed concubines play the p'i-p'a and the cheng together.<sup>20</sup>

Upon his return to the capital Han Yü made a full report to Mu-tsung who was greatly pleased and wished to employ him as a chief minister,<sup>21</sup> but he received no such appointment, perhaps because his persuasion of Wang T'ing-tsou turned out to be less effective than he thought it had been.

In the fourth month of 822 the vice-minister of the Ministry of Revenue Chang P'ing-shu submitted a memorial requesting a reform in the salt administration so that officials might sell salt directly rather than through the agency of salt merchants. He supported his proposal by listing eighteen benefits it would provide. Han Yü

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<sup>19</sup> HCLS, pp. 547-548, commentary; HYYC, p. 122.

<sup>20</sup> Ch'üan T'ang-shih (Complete T'ang Poetry) (1701; Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1960), ch. 383, pp. 4301-4302.

<sup>21</sup> Li Ao, hsing-chuang, p. 26a; Huang-fu Shih, shen-tao pei, p. 12b.

responded to this with a long memorial of his own showing why Chang's proposed reforms would not work as he thought they would. Han Yü's memorial is a major source of information on the salt monopoly, and as such it has been translated in full by Denis Twitchett.<sup>22</sup> It should suffice here, therefore, to note that Han Yü's reasons for opposing Chang's proposal are practical rather than ideological, and reflect a realistic understanding of actual administrative practices. The chief secretary of the Secretariat, Wei Ch'u-hou, also submitted a long memorial opposing the proposed reform, and it was not implemented.

On the third day of the ninth month of 822 Han Yü was transferred to the position of vice-minister of the Ministry of Personnel. In this position he was responsible for the examinations to select and promote officials and the granting of honorific titles and titles of nobility. Perhaps recalling his own days as a candidate for the selection examination, he changed procedures which had previously prevented candidates from seeing the government scribes, so that the candidates would no longer be in awe of the scribes and their power to discriminate would not be as great. When someone asked him about this, Han Yü likened the situation to people's fear of ghosts saying, "The reason

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<sup>22</sup> Twitchett, Financial Administration, pp. 165-172; original text in HCLC, pp. 375-380.

people fear ghosts is because they can't see them. If ghosts could be seen, people would not fear them. The candidates cannot see the scribes, therefore their power is great. If they could listen to them as they go in and out their power would be small."<sup>23</sup>

Han Yü remained in this position for less than a year. On the eighth day of the sixth month of 823 he was promoted to metropolitan governor (ching-chao yin) and given a concurrent appointment as censor-in-chief (yü-shih ta-fu). At this time the title censor-in-chief was purely honorary, and the real head of the Censorate was the vice censor-in-chief (yü-shih chung-ch'eng). The titular head of the Censorate had no power and was expected to pay a courtesy visit to the vice-president to pay his respects. This was embarrassing for Han Yü since the current incumbent in that office, Li Shen (d. 846),<sup>24</sup> had previously sought Han Yü's recommendation when he was a candidate for the chin-shih examination in 802 while Han Yü was a professor at the School of the Four Gates (he passed in 806), and according to contemporary rules of etiquette should have showed his respects to Han Yü.

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<sup>23</sup> Li Ao, hsing-chuang, pp. 26a-26b.

<sup>24</sup> Biographies in CTS 173, pp. 4497-4500; HTS 181, pp. 5347-5350.



It seems that the person responsible for putting Han Yü in this awkward situation was Li Feng-chi, who was once again a chief minister. Li Feng-chi did not get along with Li Shen, who as a Han-lin academician had gained the emperor's favor and who had hopes of becoming a chief minister himself. Li Feng-chi wanted to find an excuse for removing Li Shen so he would not become a chief minister and interfere with Li Feng-chi's policies, so he deliberately arranged things so that the short-tempered Li Shen would be likely to come into conflict with Han Yü.

Han Yü asked Mu-tsung to excuse him from the requirement that he call on Li Shen, citing the precedent of a civil governor of lower rank than himself who had been granted the same privilege, and the emperor granted his request. Li Shen thought that the established custom should still be followed and felt slighted because Han Yü had obtained exemption from it. Consequently he repeatedly disputed Han Yü's official policies.<sup>25</sup>

The capital region at this time was notoriously difficult to govern, but Han Yü set the tone of his administration by arresting and throwing in prison corrupt members of the powerful imperial guards, and because of this

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. quotations from the biographies of Li Feng-chi and Li Shen in HYYC, pp. 126-127; also Li Ao, hsing-chuang, p. 26b; Huang-fu Shih, shen-tao pei, p. 12b; HCLC, pp. 133-134.

and his reputation for fearlessly upholding his beliefs no one dared to break the law and in time of drought no one dared to raise the price of rice.<sup>26</sup>

Han Yü and Li Shen came into conflict again when Li sent a group of prisoners to Han Yü's office to be beaten and judged. Han Yü considered this improper and returned the prisoners to Li Shen. Li Shen informed the court of what had happened and Li Feng-chi took advantage of the opportunity to demote both men, Han Yü to vice-president of the Board of War and Li Shen to civil governor of Kiangsi. Mu-tsung didn't know about all this and still favored Li Shen, so Li was able to see the emperor and tell him of Li Feng-chi's plot. Thereupon both Han Yü and Li Shen were given new appointments. On the nineteenth day of the tenth month, seven days after their demotions, Li Shen became the vice-president of the Board of Revenue and Han Yü once again became vice-president of the Board of Personnel.<sup>27</sup>

Mu-tsung died on the twenty-second day of the first month of 824. He was succeeded by the crown prince, known to history as Ching-tsung (r. 824-827), on the following day. Han Yü retained his position under the new emperor

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<sup>26</sup> Li Ao, hsing-chuang, p. 26b.

<sup>27</sup> TCTC 243, pp. 7828-7830; Li Ao, hsing-chuang, p. 26b; CTS 173, pp. 4497-4498; date from Hung Hsing-tsu, nien-p'u, ch. 7, p. 15a.

until the fifth month when he requested a leave of absence on account of illness.

At first he went to his estate south of Ch'ang-an in the scenic area where other well-known officials such as P'ei Tu, Tu Yu, and Niu Seng-ju also had estates. Chang Chi had just left his post with the Board of Waterways, so was free to accompany Han Yü. Other friends came to visit when they could.

When Chang Chi got a new appointment and had to return to the capital, Han Yü went back too and stayed at his home in Ching-an village on the outskirts of Ch'ang-an. In the eighth month he had used up his allotted 100 days of sick leave and had to resign his post as vice-president of the Board of Personnel. He wrote to Huang-fu Shih asking him to write his tomb inscription. On the sixteenth day of the eighth month Chang Chi and Wang Chien came to visit him and it was on this occasion that Han Yü had his two concubines come out to play the p'i-p'a and the cheng as recorded in Chang Chi's sacrificial poem.<sup>28</sup>

After discussing with his friends the care of his wife and children after his death, Han Yü compared himself to his older brother Hui. He recalled that Hui's conduct was virtuous and he understood the use of medicines, taking

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<sup>28</sup> Hung Hsing-tsu, nien-p'u, ch. 7, pp. 16a-17a; Huang-fu Shih, mu-chih ming, p. 14a; Ch'üan T'ang-shih, ch. 383, p. 4302.

only those that were recommended in the Pen-ts'ao (Pharmacopeia--attributed to the legendary emperor Shen-nung), yet he died in his forty-second year, whereas Han Yü who was careless and not intelligent, ignoring prohibitions on food, reached the rank of vice-president of a board and surpassed his brother's term of life by fifteen years. If this were not sufficient, what would be? Moreover, he could take consolation in the knowledge that he had not lost his moral integrity.<sup>29</sup>

Han Yü left instructions that his burial was to be strictly according to Chinese rites without the addition of any Buddhist rites as was the common custom. He died on the second day of the twelfth month of 824 at his residence in Ching-an village in his fifty-seventh year. Ching-tsung granted him the posthumous title of president of the Board of Rites and Li Ao wrote his "Account of Conduct" recording his offices and actions and requested the Secretariat to examine his merits and provide a posthumous honorary title. The title granted was Wen (cultured). In the third month of 825 he was buried at the family home in Ho-yang.<sup>30</sup>

Even in death Han Yü was unable to escape the controversy that seemed to follow him throughout his life.

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<sup>29</sup> Li Ao, hsing-chuang, p. 27a.

<sup>30</sup> Huang-fu Shih, shen-tao pei, pp. 12b, 13b; mu-chih ming, p. 14b; Li Ao, hsing-chuang, p. 27b.

The cause of his death is unknown. The memorial accounts of his life written immediately after his death were all forbidden by custom from mentioning it. Nevertheless, scholars in later times could not resist the temptation to speculate about it, especially if it appeared that the cause of his death contradicted the principles he upheld while alive.

The evidence used to support such speculation tends to be either inconclusive or of questionable reliability (or both). The nearest thing to a contemporary reference to the cause of Han Yü's death is a quotation from a poem written in 833 by Po Chü-yi in which Po contrasts his own attainment of old age despite not taking care of himself with the early deaths of others who tried to prolong their lives. He mentions that Han Yü took sulfur, but in the end his illness was not cured.<sup>31</sup>

In discussing this issue, Lo Lien-t'ien shows that both T'ang emperors and many T'ang scholars liked to take drugs as one method of seeking immortality via the arts of Taoist alchemy. He then shows that sulfur was one of the drugs that could be used for this purpose. Like mercury, sulfur had to be refined via Taoist alchemy before it could be consumed. Han Yü knew something of the means of

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<sup>31</sup> Cited in HYYC, p. 129; tr. by Arthur Waley, Translations from the Chinese (New York: Knopf, 1941), pp. 251-252.

preparing such Taoist elixirs, since he mentions it in his tomb inscription for Li Kan, who died in the first month of 823. (However, here he seems to be warning of the dangers of taking such elixirs.) He also mentions in this inscription that on his way back to Ch'ang-an from Yüan-chou, Meng Chien sent him some Taoist elixir and he did not immediately decline it (but he doesn't actually say that he took it, either).<sup>32</sup> Lo also refers to the poem Han Yü wrote to Chou Chün-ch'ao on the same trip in 820 in which he asked Chou for medicine to cure his illness. Lo cites a Sung scholar who took this as confirming the evidence of Po Chü-yi's poem.<sup>33</sup>

All the writers cited in this discussion seem to have taken it for granted that if Han Yü took sulfur at all it must have been for Taoist purposes. No one suggests that even if he did take it, it could have been for purely medicinal purposes, even though this interpretation would be equally consistent with what Po Chü-yi says in his poem. One Sung scholar attempted to defend Han Yü by suggesting that Po Chü-yi was referring to someone else with the same personal name, and the Ch'ing scholar Ch'ien Ta-hsin (1728-1804) agreed, but Lo argues that Po knew Han Yü but did not know the other person and cites Ch'en Yin-k'o's statement

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<sup>32</sup> HCLC, pp. 319-320.

<sup>33</sup> HYYC, pp. 131, 135 n. 15.

that there were many contradictions in the thoughts of T'ang literary figures.<sup>34</sup>

Since there is no evidence that Po Chü-yi was present during Han Yü's final illness, it seems remarkable that so much importance should be assigned to a line from a poem written nine years later. Even more remarkable is another story that has Han Yü taking sulfur for a different reason.

Lo Lien-t'ien quotes chapter two of the Ch'ing-yi lu (Records of Strange Matters) by T'ao Ku (903-970) of the Five Dynasties which says that in his later years Han Yü rather liked "rouge and face powder," i.e., sex. A story was told that he took sulfur in rice broth mixed with rooster testicles, but that before taking the mixture he had to avoid sex while cooking the brew in the kitchen for 1,000 days. The result was called Treasury of the Fire Divinity (huo-ling k'u). He took some for several days and at first it seemed to be beneficial, but in the end it led to his death. It seems highly unlikely that anyone who wanted an aphrodisiac in the first place would be willing to abstain from sex for nearly three years in order to brew such a

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<sup>34</sup> HYYC, pp. 131-132. Lo's quotations are from Fang Sung-ch'ing's commentary to Hung Hsing-tsu's nien-p'u, ch. 6, pp. 12b-13b, and Ch'ien Ta-hsin's (1728-1804) Shih-chia chai yang-hsin lu (Records of New Knowledge Cultivated in the Shih-chia Studio) (1806; Taipei: Shang-wu yin-shu kuan, 1978), ch. 16, pp. 381-382.

potion! Lo admits that such stories are not entirely credible (one is reminded of the demise of Hsi-men Ch'ing in the novel Chin P'ing Mei), but since it matches so closely with what Po Chü-yi said in his poem, the evidence seems to Lo to be indisputable.<sup>35</sup>

With all due respect to Lo, the evidence is not that strong. One might suggest the possibility, for example, that this is another case like that of the wonders said to have followed Han Yü's address to the crocodiles of Ch'ao-chou, in which Han Yü's name was attached to an existing tale (perhaps by an author who had read Po Chü-yi's poem) which originally had nothing to do with him. The most useful evidence contained in this story may be that sulfur was used for purposes other than prolonging life.

Evidence from Han Yü's poems cited in support of the proposition that he had an excessive (i.e., normal?) interest in sex is similarly strained. One poem refers to a golden hairpin half fallen in a potentially romantic setting,<sup>36</sup> while the third of three poems entitled "Moved by Spring" (kan-ch'un) includes the lines, "a beautiful girl dances on a bamboo mat, her clear pupils piercing like

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<sup>35</sup> HYYC, p. 131.

<sup>36</sup> HCLS, pp. 528-529.



swords or lances," thus showing that Han Yü could not forget sexual feelings.<sup>37</sup>

Each of these quotations belongs to a specific social context and does not necessarily reflect Han Yü's personal values except in a very general way. On the other hand, the idea that he ought to forget about sexual feelings tells us a great deal about the values of the writers who considered this an issue worth discussing. They assumed that his values and theirs were the same, but that assumption was not entirely correct. We will examine Han Yü's values from a different perspective in the following chapters.

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<sup>37</sup> HCLS, p. 431; HYYC, p. 134. The cause of Han Yü's death remains a controversial issue. Recently in Taiwan an article appeared in which it was suggested that his death may have been due to venereal disease. Some of Han Yü's descendants in Taiwan sued the author of the article for libel and won, giving rise to a lively discussion regarding academic freedom and the rights and responsibilities of authors. See Yen Ling-fen et al., Fei-Han-an lun-chan (The War of Words Concerning the Han Yü Libel Case) (Taipei: Tung-fu ch'u-pan she, 1978).

## THE INTELLECTUAL BACKGROUND OF

### HAN YÜ'S THOUGHT

Some mention has already been made of the general intellectual character of Han Yü's times. At this point it may be useful to add some further details on T'ang intellectual history as a preliminary to a discussion of those of Han Yü's writings which relate most directly to his ideas.

In the history of Chinese thought, the T'ang has often been treated as a period when Buddhist thought flourished while Confucian thought stagnated. This does not mean that there was no Confucian thought at all, for the Confucian classics remained the basic texts for a standard education and most statesmen embodied Confucian values to at least some extent. There were not, however, many men who are considered to have made major contributions to the development of Confucian thought.

The only Confucian thinker who is normally mentioned prior to Han Yü is Wang T'ung (584?-617), a somewhat controversial figure said to have had many disciples who were active at the beginning of the T'ang, but whose very

existence has been called into question.<sup>1</sup> Wang T'ung is supposed to have written a series of continuations of the Confucian classics, but if these works really existed they are no longer extant. The only two works still in existence that purport to convey his teachings, the Primal Classic (Yüan-ching) and the Discourses on the Mean (Chung-shuo, also known as the Wen-chung-tzu), are suspected of being forgeries.

The contents of Wang T'ung's surviving writings, if they are genuine, contains little that could link him to Han Yü except in the most general sense of upholding traditional Confucian values. Moreover, Wang T'ung differs from Han Yü in his more sympathetic attitude toward Taoism (primarily philosophical Taoism) and Buddhism. This was consistent with the generally eclectic approach to philosophy common in the T'ang. Wang's most notable departure from conventional Confucian thought was his argument that commentary was harmful to the classics, presumably because it distracted attention from the texts of the classics themselves and permitted the introduction of misinterpretations that distorted their meaning.

Among those who have been identified as students of Wang T'ung was Wei Cheng (580-643), the Confucian minister

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<sup>1</sup> Howard J. Wechsler, "The Confucian Teacher Wang T'ung (584?-617): One Thousand Years of Controversy," T'oung Pao, vol. 43, nos. 4-5 (1977), pp. 225-272.

whose relationship with T'ang T'ai-tsung is the subject of Howard Wechsler's Mirror to the Son of Heaven. While there is insufficient evidence either to confirm or to disprove Wei Cheng's relationship with Wang T'ung, it is clear that there was a strong advocate of Confucian values at the court of the second T'ang emperor.

Imperial support for Confucian values was reflected in the court's sponsorship of a new edition of the Confucian classics, the Five Classics with Orthodox Commentaries (wu-ching cheng-i), compiled during the years 638 to 653. This edition of the classics attempted to harmonize differing interpretations that had arisen since the Han dynasty. However, as the modern scholar P'i Hsi-jui has noted, the two men most responsible for the selection of the commentaries, K'ung Ying-ta (d. 648) and Yen Shih-ku (581-645), both tended to favor interpretations associated with what was called the school of "Southern Learning" (nan-hsüeh).<sup>2</sup>

This school continued the relatively rationalistic approach to the classics advocated by Han scholars such as Yang Hsiung (53 B.C.-18 A.D.) and Wang Ch'ung (27-ca. 100 A.D.), who had reacted against the theories of Tung Chung-shu (ca. 179-ca. B.C.) and his followers who found hidden

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<sup>2</sup> P'i Hsi-jui, Ching-hsüeh li-shih (History of Classical Studies) (Taipei: Ho-lo t'u-shu ch'u-pan she, 1974), pp. 196-210.

symbolism and cosmological significance in the classics. In addition to this, however, Southern Learning was also strongly influenced by the interpretations of Neo-Taoist (hsüan-hsüeh) scholars such as Wang Pi (226-249), whereas its competitor, the school of Northern Learning (pei-hsüeh), had favored the commentaries of Cheng Hsüan (127-200), who had attempted a syncretic approach to the classics that drew on both of the major Han schools of interpretation, but that leaned away from undue emphasis on symbolism and cosmology.

The result was that T'ang students of the classics were given commentaries that tended to minimize the differences between Confucian and Taoist philosophy while emphasizing interpretations that showed them to be harmonious and compatible. This tendency to attempt to harmonize the differences that might otherwise separate people was, of course, consistent with the political goal of strengthening the foundations of an empire which had been re-united for only a short time after several hundred years of division.

A further example of the eclectic nature of early T'ang thought is the Essentials of Government from Divers Books (Ch'ün-shu chih-yao), an anthology whose chief editor was Wei Cheng. The purpose of this book was to provide examples of good and bad conduct and their consequences for the ethical guidance of the emperor. The materials it

includes are not exclusively Confucian, however, for it draws upon Taoist, Mohist, and Legalist sources as well.<sup>3</sup>

We have already noted in an earlier chapter that the T'ang rulers patronized both Buddhism and Taoism as well as Confucianism. This was at the same time both politically advantageous and a reflection of the personal interests of the emperors. These two teachings coexisted with Confucianism, sometimes overshadowing it, but never displacing it. Confucianism reinforced values such as social harmony and respect for authority, and it was in the state's interest to encourage the people to adhere to such values, so Confucianism remained the basis for a standard education. Study of the Confucian classics was further encouraged by their use as the basis of the most prestigious of the civil service examinations.

With the exception of those who embarked on a religious career in early childhood, therefore, most serious students of Taoist and Buddhist thought were quite familiar with the basic teachings of Confucianism, and few of them ever totally rejected Confucian values. It was much more likely that they would selectively apply Confucian values in certain situations and Buddhist or Taoist values in others. Many T'ang poets adopted a Buddhist or Taoist attitude in

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<sup>3</sup> Wechsler, Mirror to the Son of Heaven, pp. 113, 168-169.

their poetry, but few, if any, of them went so far as to reject the Confucian duty to respect their parents and to observe the traditional rites of mourning when their parents died.

The reason for the persistence of Confucian values of this sort goes beyond the fact that they were encouraged by the state. At a very basic level, the fundamental values of Confucianism are really Chinese values which were identified and affirmed by Confucius in his teachings. To the extent that those same values were still held in the T'ang, Confucianism continued to be socially relevant.

A critical question for advocates of Confucianism such as Han Yü was, therefore, to what extent did Confucian values remain relevant to T'ang society? The very strength of Han Yü's defense of Confucian values suggests that he thought they were being seriously threatened. It is clear from his arguments that he saw the greatest danger as coming from Buddhism and religious Taoism (tao-chiao) and from the failure of his fellow Chinese to cultivate the values that had served them well in the past. Even though Confucian values had not been completely displaced in the T'ang, they had been diluted to the point that for many people they might be perceived as only one of several alternative value systems, all equally valid. The challenge to Confucian values was the more serious because it was of long standing.

The three-way rivalry between Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism had been developing since the first century A.D., when Buddhism first entered China and when Taoism was adapted as the ideological foundation for a communal religious sect. As China fell apart politically during the Period of Disunion, Taoism and Buddhism sometimes borrowed from one another, sometimes stimulated one another. Both developed ecclesiastical organizations and each supported multiple systems of elaborate doctrine. In their fullest manifestation these doctrines were so complex that they could only be understood by members of the same educated elite who bore the responsibility for transmitting the teachings of Confucianism.

To some extent Confucianism was the victim of its own success. Ever since Confucianism had attained the status of official state ideology during the reign of Emperor Wu (r. 141-87 B.C.), it had come to be so closely associated with the Han state that when the state began to disintegrate in the second century A.D., many of those who were disillusioned with the imperial government tended to feel dissatisfied with Confucianism as well.

Political developments in the last years of the Han and in the succeeding Period of Disunion further contributed to the creation of an atmosphere in which Confucian ethics seemed out of place. The political philosophy of



Legalism, which favored strict laws and severe punishments, seemed to be returning to favor nearly four hundred years after it had been discredited by its association with the hated Ch'in dynasty (221-207 B.C.). Life as a court official, which had been the ultimate goal of every Confucian gentleman, was fraught with danger and there seemed little hope of reforming contemporary society along Confucian lines.<sup>4</sup>

Under these circumstances the Taoist and Buddhist advocacy of withdrawal from society may well have seemed to represent the only appropriate response for gentlemen who still clung to traditional ethical values. T'ao Ch'ien (365-427), the premier poet of the age, represented the feelings of such gentlemen when he wrote of finding happiness in retirement, where at least in nature there still remained the sense of harmony that seemed to have disappeared from the world of men.

The sort of withdrawal advocated by T'ao Ch'ien was similar to the attitude of philosophical Taoism, where the individual did not cut himself off completely from human society, but lived simply in harmony with both nature and other men. Another sort of withdrawal was that advocated by both Buddhism and religious Taoism. The ultimate goal of

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Etienne Balazs, Chinese Civilization and Bureaucracy (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), chs. 13 and 14.

both was to transcend life in this world and attain a more satisfactory state of existence either in the Buddhist nirvana or as an immortal in one of the Taoist heavens.<sup>5</sup>

The shift in focus from this world to something other than this world marks a significant change in outlook from what had previously been the dominant tendency in Chinese thought. Despite all the specific differences that separated them, all the major schools of Chinese thought in the past had concentrated their attention on life in this world. Even when they spoke of death, both Confucianism and philosophical Taoism were concerned primarily with the living and the way they should conduct themselves in this world.

Behind this lay a basically positive attitude toward human life, an assumption that life in the present world was good, or could become good, and that it was worthwhile to devote one's efforts to learning how to interact with the world. If this positive attitude were lost, as often seems to have been the case in the Period of Disunion, then schools of thought whose philosophy partly relied on it, such as Confucianism, would necessarily seem less relevant to contemporary human needs.

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<sup>5</sup> For the role that withdrawal came to play in Confucianism, see Frederick W. Mote, "Confucian Eremitism in the Yüan Period," in Wright, The Confucian Persuasion, pp. 202-240.

For those who felt the need for some sort of philosophical guidance (of course, not everyone did), the loss of confidence in Confucianism made them more receptive to alternate ways of dealing with the unsatisfactory nature of their world. Buddhism came fully equipped with a detailed--even if somewhat confusing--explanation of why life was unsatisfactory and what could be done about it.

Buddhism entered China in the first century A.D., but did not become popular until the Period of Disunion when life in China seemed to confirm its teachings.<sup>6</sup> In addition to offering consolation to the suffering, Buddhism brought with it from India a complex system of thought that attracted the attention of many members of the educated elite in China. Buddhist thought had a special fascination for Chinese intellectuals because it dealt with issues that were new to them and offered a range of speculation about the nature of the universe and human life that went far beyond anything they had encountered previously.

Merely unravelling the various strands of Buddhist thought was a major endeavor, especially since the different schools were not introduced in any kind of order and the translations were at first not very accurate. It could take years to understand clearly the teachings of even a single

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<sup>6</sup> On the history of Chinese Buddhism, see Kenneth Ch'en, Buddhism in China: A Historical Survey (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964).

Buddhist school. For those who were dissatisfied with the world they lived in, this might be a welcome diversion. Such study was, however, undertaken at the expense of other pursuits that a Confucian like Han Yü might have considered more useful.

In circumstances where existing political and social units had broken down and were no longer able to meet the needs of the people Buddhism and religious Taoism probably did serve a useful purpose by providing new bases for social organization and mutual assistance. Buddhist monasteries and Taoist communities could be places of refuge for displaced persons for whom no family or governmental assistance was available. Moreover, Buddhism introduced charitable institutions and practices that had not previously existed in China.

For members of the ruling class both religions offered a further attraction by providing a new form of support for the legitimacy of their superior social and political status. In a period when most dynasties were of short duration and when the ruling elite often lacked strong social ties to the masses of the ruled, identification with Buddhist or Taoist religion helped to justify their monopoly of political power and their high social status.

There were thus good reasons for the rise and spread of Buddhist and Taoist religions during the Period of

Disunion. Once established on firm foundations their further development took on a life of its own only partly dependent on the conditions that had originally given them birth. From about the fifth century onward, Chinese Buddhists had good translations of Indian texts and they were sufficiently comfortable with their understanding of the principles of Buddhism to begin to form distinctively Chinese schools of Buddhism. In the process Buddhism lost some of its alien character and for that reason became more attractive to larger numbers of Chinese.<sup>7</sup>

Although our present knowledge of the development of the Taoist religion is less complete than what we know about Buddhism, it is apparent that it went through a similar process of evolution. It too developed at least three different schools, each with its own scriptures which were believed to have been "revealed" to its leaders, who were often members of elite families, especially in the south. These scriptures were often written in an esoteric language which could be understood only by those who had been initiated into the mysteries of the religion. Among other things, this permitted the scriptures to be explained differently to different groups of believers according to their intellectual capacity and interests.

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Kenneth K. S. Ch'en, The Chinese Transformation of Buddhism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973).

The fact that they could be understood at different levels was important for the development of both religions because it permitted them to appeal to a much broader range of people than would have been possible otherwise. While their most sophisticated texts and doctrines attracted those who were intellectually inclined, their ceremonies and claims of spiritual power attracted those who hoped for salvation or protection against harmful spirits. Probably the majority of followers of both religions were not able to understand the full meaning of their doctrines and were attracted by the desire to obtain some benefit, either spiritual or earthly (e.g., as an answer to prayers or protection from harm).

As a result of their broadly-based appeal and the presence of favorable historical circumstances, by the T'ang both Buddhist and Taoist religions had attracted many followers and established many temples, often with large endowments thanks to the generosity of their believers. These temples were normally exempt from taxation as were those persons who were formally registered as priests or monks of a recognized temple or sect.

Because of their prosperity and their large following, both religions were very influential and wielded considerable economic power as well. Many temples had extensive landholdings (some of which continued to be

controlled by their wealthy donors who thus obtained exemption from the land tax), and some engaged in commercial enterprises such as mills and money lending. Figures cited by Kenneth Ch'en indicate that during the K'ai-yüan reign period (713-741), before the rebellion of An Lu-shan, the total number of Buddhist temples in the empire was 5,358, while in the city of Ch'ang-an there were sixty-four monasteries and twenty-seven nunneries. The official census records of the same period list 75,524 monks and 50,576 nuns.<sup>8</sup>

There were already complaints early in the T'ang period that many persons who obtained the status of monks had done so for economic rather than religious reasons. In the same article referred to above, Kenneth Ch'en quotes a memorial of 711 which charges that "At present those who are able to put up wealth and to rely on their influence have all become sramanas (monks). Those who wish to avoid the corvée and to practice deceit have all become converted. Only those who are poor and virtuous have not been ordained."<sup>9</sup> In 747 the T'ang government introduced a system of official ordination under which monks were required to

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<sup>8</sup> Kenneth Ch'en, "The Economic Background of the Hui-ch'ang Suppression of Buddhism," pp. 78, 85, 92-104. See also Jacques Gernet, Les Aspects Economiques du Bouddhisme dans la Société Chinoise du Ve au Xe siècle (Saigon: Ecole Française d'Extrême Orient, 1956).

<sup>9</sup> Ch'en, "Economic Background," p. 79.

obtain a certificate of ordination from the Bureau of Sacrifices, but the sale of these certificates to raise money during the rebellion of An Lu-shan defeated the purpose of the system.

In the post-rebellion period the T'ang court had great need of the revenue and manpower that the great religious establishments controlled. But the power and influence of these establishments was such that except for the actions of individual officials (such as Han Yü in 809), no significant action was taken by the government to deal with this problem until the major suppression of Buddhism which took place in the years from 841 to 845.<sup>10</sup>

Lest these religious establishments appear more monolithic than they really were, it should be noted that not only did Taoists and Buddhists compete with one another for followers and patronage, but different schools or sects within each religion were also in competition with one another. For the Buddhists in particular, the T'ang was a time when they became especially conscious of the differences that divided them despite the common foundation of their beliefs.

The identities of the Buddhist schools which were most prominent in the T'ang reflects the extent to which

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<sup>10</sup> Edwin O. Reischauer, Ennin's Travels in T'ang China (New York: Ronald Press, 1955), pp. 217-271.



Buddhism had become a Chinese religion, not just a Chinese branch of an Indian religion. The four most important schools, T'ien-t'ai, Hua-yen, Pure Land, and Ch'an, all originated in China (despite claims to the contrary) and none had a counterpart in India.

Both the T'ien-t'ai and Hua-yen schools of Buddhism stressed the unity which underlay the apparent differences that separated the various schools of their religion. The approach employed by T'ien-t'ai was to classify the doctrines of the different schools (p'an-chiao) according to a theory by which each was said to be appropriate for believers at different levels of attainment. Hua-yen, whose teachings had much in common with T'ien-t'ai, also classified the doctrines of the different schools (putting its own on top, of course), but emphasized a complex doctrine of the interpenetration of all things which stressed that at the level of ultimate truth all differences were illusory.

While these doctrines may be explained in purely Buddhist terms, one may also see in them something of the pre-Buddhist Chinese concept of an "organic" universe in which "all of the parts of the entire cosmos belong to one

organic whole and...they all interact as participants in one spontaneously self-generating life process."<sup>11</sup>

The influence of Chinese values on Buddhism is most apparent in the Ch'an (in Japanese, zen; both representing the Sanskrit dhyana), or meditation, school. Like T'ien-t'ai and Hua-yen, this is a purely Chinese school of Buddhism, despite its attempts to trace its roots back to India. Ch'an accepted many of the philosophical premises of T'ien-t'ai and Hua-yen, but rejected the notion that long years of textual study were indispensable to the attainment of enlightenment. Ch'an Buddhists did engage in such study, but they stressed that the sort of insight that brings enlightenment comes as a result of a kind of intuitive leap to a higher level of understanding within the mind. They believed that meditation was more effective in bringing this about than the extended study of complex religious doctrines. They wanted to avoid becoming so attached to the study of religious philosophy that study itself became an obstacle to attaining enlightenment. Consequently, they advocated oral transmission of their teachings directly from master to disciple and tried to express their teachings as simply and directly as possible.

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<sup>11</sup> Frederick W. Mote, Intellectual Foundations of China (New York: Knopf, 1971), p. 19. See also Joseph Needham, Science and Civilization in China (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), vol. 2, ch. 13.

In addition, they employed the doctrine of the universal presence of the essence of Buddhahood (which was also an essential part of the philosophy of both T'ien-t'ai and Hua-yen) to justify an attitude toward life in this world that was more positive than that of other schools of Buddhism. If the Buddha nature is present in all things at all times, then it should not be necessary to reject the world, only to learn to look at it differently. This attitude enabled them to view the world in a way which was much more compatible with traditional Chinese values than had previously been possible. Ch'an's debt to philosophical Taoism is apparent in many aspects of its teachings, such as its advocacy of simplicity and detached acceptance of the world as it is. Here, also, one may detect evidence of Chinese values rising to the surface after many generations of being submerged under a thick layer of Indian religious philosophy.

Ch'an was subdivided into several sub-schools and during the eighth century there was intense competition among these schools, each of which claimed to be the only legitimate transmitter of the school's original teachings.<sup>12</sup> One of the methods these sub-schools used to support their claims to legitimacy was to trace the transmission of Ch'an

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. Philip B. Yampolsky, The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), pp. 1-57.

doctrines through a series of patriarchs from India to China ending with the their own present leadership. It has been suggested that there is a similarity between this practice and Han Yü's discussion of the transmission of the teachings of Confucius (tao-t'ung).<sup>13</sup>

It is not impossible that Han Yü was influenced, either directly or indirectly, by this aspect of the competition for legitimacy within the Ch'an school. It should not be forgotten, however, that ever since the Period of Disunion upper class Chinese had been very much aware of the importance of being identified with a well known and respected lineage. The orthodox line of the transmission of Ch'an teachings from one master to another was essentially the religious counterpart of the genealogies compiled by elite lineages to keep track of their members and confirm their superior social status. It would indeed be ironic if Han Yü, notorious for his anti-Buddhist opinions, had gotten the idea for his doctrine of the transmission of the Confucian Way from Buddhist sources. A more likely explanation, however, is that both Han Yü and the Ch'an Buddhists belonged to the same cultural milieu and that both were influenced by the same social values despite their obvious philosophical differences.

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<sup>13</sup> T'ao Hsi-sheng, Chung-kuo cheng-chih ssu-hsiang shih (History of Chinese Political Thought) (1943; Taipei: Lien-ho t'u-shu kung-ssu, n.d.), vol. 4, pp. 274-275.

Ch'an is not the only Buddhist school in which one can detect a reaction against an excessive emphasis on complicated religious doctrines. The Pure Land (ching-t'u) school required of its followers only that they express sincere faith in the Buddha Amitabha. They would then be assured of rebirth in the Pure Land where conditions would be perfect for them to hear and understand the teachings of the Buddha. This doctrine made it much easier for ordinary people to practice Buddhism without the need to abandon their families and occupations--one of the aspects of Buddhism that had been strongly criticized as contrary to traditional Chinese values. Although the Pure Land school had been in existence in China since the fifth century, it experienced rapid growth during the T'ang. Its last great master, Fa-chao (712-804), was active in Ch'ang-an during the early years of Han Yü's residence there.<sup>14</sup>

Of all the schools of Buddhism active in China, Ch'an and Pure Land were best adapted to the Chinese environment, and they ultimately became the dominant schools of Buddhism in China. Among the various schools of Chinese Buddhism they were both the most compatible with traditional Chinese social values and the least dependent on patronage

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<sup>14</sup> For a detailed treatment of Pure Land in this period, see Tsukamoto Zenryu, To chuki no Jodo-kyo (Pure Land Buddhism in the mid-T'ang) (Kyoto: Toho bunka gakuin, 1933).

from the court and the educated elite. These qualities proved to be critical in ensuring the survival of these two schools when other schools of Buddhism in China declined after the suppression of 841-845 and ultimately ceased to exist as separate entities.

With the perspective of history we may now identify changes that were taking place within T'ang Buddhism that would be of great significance in the long term. It is unlikely, however, that the significance of these changes was apparent in Han Yü's time. If any trend seemed apparent at that time, it was probably toward an increasing interest in magic and esoteric doctrines such as that of the Tantric Buddhism taught by the monk Amoghavajra (705-774), who enjoyed imperial support for nearly thirty years. Since magic and esoteric doctrines were also common elements of religious Taoism, it may well have seemed that this was the direction in which Chinese religious beliefs were headed.

The fact that the development of Chinese thought and religion ultimately took a different direction is due partly to internal factors such as those discussed above, and partly to external factors such as the rebellion of An Lu-shan and the rise of Islam. The Chinese defeat by an Islamic army at the battle of Talas in 751 marked the end of Chinese domination of Central Asia. The situation became worse after the outbreak of the rebellion of An Lu-shan when

T'ang armies had to be withdrawn from border areas to fight the rebels and protect the court. This left the remaining Chinese garrisons in Central Asia vulnerable to attacks from the Uighurs and the Tibetans, who soon controlled much of the territory formerly held by the Chinese. Contact with India was thus made much more difficult. At the same time, Buddhism in India began a period of decline due to internal decay, competition from new Hindu sects, and persecution by Muslim conquerors. This eliminated the possibility of using the stimulus of new ideas from Indian Buddhism to reinvigorate Chinese Buddhism as had been done a number of times in the past. Chinese Buddhists were now on their own. Whatever new developments might arise in Chinese Buddhism would have to come from within their own tradition.

Within China, the intellectual impact of the rebellion may be compared with the situation at the end of the Han dynasty when the failure of the political system led to a crisis of confidence in Confucian values. Both situations gave rise to questions about how such a disaster could have occurred, but there were two important differences in the case of the T'ang. The dynasty did not fall, so there was still hope that reforms could be made that would restore it to its former glory. And Confucianism was not so closely identified with the government that it had to share the blame for the government's near defeat.

On the contrary, because Hsüan-tsung's court had been noted for its patronage of both Buddhism and Taoism, it was possible for Confucian critics to argue that part of the reason for the failure of the T'ang political system to preserve order was that the government had paid too little attention to Confucian principles.

The fact that the rebellion had failed to overthrow the T'ang dynasty suggested the possibility of a "restoration" comparable to the restoration of the Han dynasty after the usurpation of Wang Mang (r. 9-23 A.D.). When conditions failed to return to their pre-rebellion state despite the surrender of the last of the rebels, it was obvious that something was amiss. However, the problem was not seen in purely ideological terms.

Young men like Han Hui who were not in positions where they could influence official policy might discuss statecraft in an idealistic way, but the court and its highest officials tended to be pre-occupied with practical matters related to the continued survival of the central government. Before any other reforms could be effective it was necessary to strengthen the armies and ensure that there would be adequate revenues to support a re-assertion of central authority. Progress was made in both areas but, as we have seen, matters were complicated by the fact that the officials responsible for implementing government policies



were often equally concerned with protecting their own interests and keeping their faction in power.

Those intellectuals who found stimulus for thought in the problems of the post-rebellion period thus were not generally high officials themselves. Those who specialized in the critical study of the Confucian classics, such as Tan Chu and his followers, do not appear to have had much influence in politics. On the other hand, those who sought to exert a more direct influence on government policies, while not ignoring the classics, did seem to devote more attention to other topics.

An example of a thinker in the latter category is Tu Yu (735-812), whose thought has been studied by Professor Pulleyblank.<sup>15</sup> Tu Yu's interest in governmental institutions is reflected in his T'ung-tien (Comprehensive Institutions), an encyclopedic history of the institutions of Chinese government from antiquity to 755. Written between 766 and 801, the T'ung-tien provided the historical background for an analysis of contemporary political problems along with a commentary on selected topics expressing Tu Yu's own opinions. Although most of his official career was spent serving in the provinces, Tu Yu held office in the capital twice. Significantly, both times

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<sup>15</sup> Pulleyblank, "Neo-Confucianism and Neo-Legalism," pp. 97-106.

during periods when major institutional reforms were being attempted: between 780 and 782 during Yang Yen's reforms of the financial system and again in 803 when preparations were already underway for the ill-fated reforms which were attempted during the short reign of the emperor Shun-tsung. The conventional view has been that in the latter period Tu Yu was an elder statesman who was merely being used as a figurehead by Wang Shu-wen, who acted as his deputy in controlling state finances. In Pulleyblank's view however, a closer connection seems likely. Even though Tu Yu may not have been a member of the reform group, "there is good reason to think that...his ideas were influential among them and he was looked upon as a source of leadership and inspiration."<sup>16</sup>

If one accepts the proposition that Tu Yu's ideas reflect at least one current of reform thought in this period, then it may be useful to summarize some of his main points in order to compare them with Han Yü's ideas. One way in which Tu Yu differed from most of his contemporaries was in what Pulleyblank calls his "undeniable Legalist affinities." He appreciated the work of political planners of the past, but felt that the essential truths of the past should not be imitated but adapted to the needs of the

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<sup>16</sup> Pulleyblank, "Neo-Confucianism and Neo-Legalism, " p. 110.

present. Pulleyblank notes that such views "are usually associated, if not necessarily with pure Legalism, at least with the Legalist pole within Confucianism."<sup>17</sup>

Tu Yu disagreed with the Taoist ideal of a "golden age of simplicity before the creation of social institutions." He agreed with Han Yü's view that life for the ancient Chinese was primitive and barbaric, but credited the rise of civilization to favorable environmental factors which gave birth to sages who created political and cultural institutions according to the needs of the times. He felt that the progress of social development had been continuous and included even such men as the founders of the Ch'in dynasty among those who had contributed to that progress. He emphasized the material well-being of the people as a means for judging the state of civilization, and found the basis for "civilizing transformation" (chiao-hua), a favorite term of Confucian reformers, in "bringing about a sufficiency of food and clothing."

Tu Yu may have inspired Liu Tsung-yüan's famous criticism of feudalism with his own argument that while a feudal system might benefit a particular royal family, the people would benefit more under a centralized bureaucratic government. This argument responded to those who had suggested the restoration of feudal institutions as a means

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<sup>17</sup> Pulleyblank, pp. 99-100.

of combatting the tendency of the military governors to act contrary to the interests of the throne. Despite favoring bureaucratic institutions, however, Tu Yu did not favor the selection of officials via the examination system. Having entered office through hereditary privilege himself, Tu Yu felt that the choice of new appointees was better left to the personal judgement of senior officials. Tu Yu favored reforms which shifted the basis of taxation to land rather than population, consistent with his participation in Yang Yen's financial reforms, and stressed the primacy of agriculture as the economic foundation of the state. His lack of sympathy for merchants and commerce suggest to Pulleyblank a Legalist bias which contrasts with Han Yü's more sympathetic acceptance of their legitimate role in T'ang society (as reflected, for example, in his memorial on the proposed reform of the salt monopoly in 822).<sup>18</sup>

With this background as a basis for comparison, we may now proceed to an examination of some of Han Yü's ideas to see how they fit into this historical and intellectual climate.

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<sup>18</sup> Pulleyblank, pp. 99-106.

THE TEXTUAL BASIS OF HAN YÜ'S CONSERVATIVE IMAGE:  
HIS DISCUSSION OF THE "WAY" AND "ON THE BUDDHA'S BONE"

Since much of Han Yü's image in later times derived from the sentiments he expressed in his essay "An Inquiry Concerning the Way" (Yüan tao) and his "Memorial on the Buddha's Bone" (Lun fo-ku piao), they are the logical starting point for a study of his thought. We will then look at some of his other writings on related subjects in an attempt to gain a better perspective on these two pieces and determine to what extent they were really representative of his thought.

As we have noted previously, the five essays which all have titles beginning with the character yüan were probably written between 800 and 805. Although it is not known precisely when they were written or even whether they were all written at the same or at different times, it seems quite likely that the ideas contained in these essays were developed over a period of time, probably beginning with Han Yü's arrival in Ch'ang-an as a candidate for the chin-shih examination.

During his years of unemployment in Ch'ang-an Han Yü certainly had sufficient leisure time to engage in

philosophical discussions with other young men who were similarly unsuccessful and, in all probability, just as frustrated as he was. In these circumstances it is easy to imagine Han Yü among a group of failed chin-shih candidates discussing the problems of the world and what he would do to solve those problems if only he were in a position to do so. Such discussions probably continued in Pien-chou where Han Yü found himself in the company of like-minded friends who shared many of his political and philosophical views.

Professor Rideout was probably right in seeing a connection between Li Ao's "Returning to One's True Nature" (Fu-hsing shu)<sup>1</sup> and Han Yü's Yüan tao, but it is not necessary to assume, as he does, that Han Yü's essay was a response to Li Ao's.<sup>2</sup> It is just as likely that each man was responding in his own way to the same issues which had been the topics of numerous discussions in which both men took part. Both Han Yü and Li Ao are obviously concerned with dissuading Chinese gentlemen from succumbing to the attractions of Buddhist philosophy. Li Ao does so by providing an approach to Confucian self-cultivation which incorporates some of the qualities of Buddhist thought that Chinese intellectuals had found attractive. He showed how it was possible to employ the techniques of Buddhist thought

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1 Translated by Barrett, Li Ao, pp. 217-277.

2 Rideout, "Context of the Yüan Tao and Yüan Hsing."

in the pursuit of Confucian goals, finding new significance in texts which were already an established part of the Confucian tradition. In doing so, he anticipated some of the basic characteristics of the new form of Confucianism which was born in the Sung period.

Han Yü approached the same problem from a different direction, stressing the points on which Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism differed in order to show why he considered Confucianism superior. His emphasis is not on the inner self-cultivation of the individual, but on the interaction of the individual with the rest of human society. In Han Yü's view, Confucianism contributes to the welfare of human society as a whole while Buddhism and Taoism harm society by interfering with the network of relationships and system of values that are necessary for society to function effectively.

The essay Yüan tao can be interpreted as an argument presented by one side in an on-going debate in which we must use our imaginations to reconstruct the arguments of the opposing side. The content of the essay suggests that Han Yü's purpose is to refute the proposition that there is really no significant difference between Confucianism and its rivals, so it is not necessary for a Confucian gentleman to reject them. This was clearly a common view at the time, as was illustrated earlier in our reference to the Buddhist

and Taoist pursuits of the members of the ku-wen literature movement in the eighth century. The intellectual tendencies that prompted Albert Dien to coin the term "Buddho-Confucian" to describe Yen Chih-t'ui (531-c. 591) were still relevant in Han Yü's time.<sup>3</sup>

The title Yüan tao had appeared previously as the title of chapters in two well-known books, the Huai-nan-tzu (The Master of Huai-nan, referring to the Han prince who sponsored its compilation), an eclectic work of the second century B.C. generally classified as Taoist, and the Wen-hsin tiao-lung (translated by Vincent Shih as The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons), an important work of literary criticism dating from the late fifth century A.D. Han Yü was certainly aware of these two books and it is likely that he had read them, but there is no apparent connection between their chapters entitled Yüan tao and his essay of the same name.

Moreover, Han Yü did not write just a single essay entitled Yüan tao. He wrote five essays of unequal length and differing in contents, all with two-word titles consisting of the word yüan and a noun which identifies the topic of the essay: Yüan tao, Yüan hsing, Yüan hui, Yüan jen, and Yüan kuei. The meaning of the nouns is quite clear

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<sup>3</sup> Albert E. Dien, "Yen Chih-t'ui (531-591+): A Buddho-Confucian," in Wright and Twitchett, Confucian Personalities, pp. 43-64.



and presents no problem in translation. For example, there is no doubt that the tao in the title of the first essay refers to the Way taken in a philosophical sense. The concept of the Way was common to virtually all schools of Chinese thought, although each interpreted the term in the light of its own values and beliefs. The meanings of the other nouns is also clear: "human nature," "slander," "mankind," and "ghosts." The meaning of the term yüan in this context is less obvious, therefore some explanation may be in order.

The character yüan by itself means source or origin. By extension this takes on the added meaning of "basic" or "essential" when used adjectively to describe another noun. Taken verbally, it means "to trace the origins of" or "to inquire into." This is the sense in which the term has been interpreted in most English translations of the Yüan tao. This is not a common meaning of the word yüan, but Han Yü was quite capable of using words in unusual ways. It should be understood, of course, that the word "inquiry" in this context does not refer to an impartial investigation of data, for the purpose of the essay is clearly to present an argument in favor of a particular view of the tao. In all five of these essays Han Yü is concerned with explaining his interpretation of topics that he feels have been misunderstood by others. In the Yüan tao his aim is to

describe what he considers to be the true nature of the Way in order to stress the way it differs from and is superior to the Way of the Buddhists and Taoists.

While the translation presented here will follow the generally accepted interpretation of the term, it may be of interest to consider the consequences of interpreting the word yüan as an adjective. This is interesting because it brings up the possibility that Han Yü's choice of the term yüan might have been influenced by a desire to respond to a Buddhist concept with which he disagreed.

Buddhists frequently referred to the "original nature" (pen-hsing) of man, by which they meant the Buddha-nature which constituted the true nature of man in contrast to his physical being which they considered impermanent and, therefore, unreal. The fact that both Han Yü and Li Ao wrote essays on human nature suggests that it was a topic of some importance to them. While Li Ao was willing to answer the Buddhists by using their own terminology to present his Confucian alternative to their philosophy,<sup>4</sup> Han Yü seems to have made an effort to employ in these essays terms that carried no non-Confucian associations. Han Yü's essay Yüan hsing may, therefore, be an attempt to provide an alternate explanation of human nature in contrast to the Buddhist view, just as in the Yüan

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<sup>4</sup> Barrett, Li Ao, pp. 278-284.

tao he seeks to present the Confucian Way as a better alternative to the Ways of the Taoists and Buddhists. Looked at in this way, Yüan hsing would refer to the "original nature" or "true nature" of man as seen from a Confucian point of view, and the titles of the other essays would be translated similarly.

Of course, this interpretation is speculative since there is no way to know what was in Han Yü's mind when he wrote these essays. However, even if it is not the meaning that Han Yü intended, it is possible that this is how his title was understood by some T'ang readers more familiar with Buddhist than with Confucian literature.

The translation that follows is complete and fairly literal so that the ideas it contains may be compared with those which Han Yü expressed on other occasions.

#### An Inquiry Concerning the Way

Universal love is called humanity (jen). Practicing it in an appropriate way is called righteousness (yi). To conduct oneself in accordance with these is called the Way (tao). To be sufficient in oneself without reliance on anything external is called virtue (te). Humanity and righteousness are definite terms whereas the Way and virtue are abstract terms, therefore there is a Way for the superior man (chün-tzu) and a Way for the inferior man (hsiao jen), and there is an inauspicious virtue and an auspicious virtue. Thus, Lao-tzu's belittling humanity and righteousness does not harm them but shows the narrowness of his viewpoint, just as one sitting in a well observing the sky and saying, "The sky is small" would not make the sky small. He took mere kindness to be humanity and isolated acts to be righteousness, so his belittling them is appropriate. However, what

he calls the Way is only his concept of the Way. It is not what I call the Way. What he calls virtue is only his concept of virtue. It is not what I call virtue. The Way and virtue as I define them always include humanity and righteousness. To speak of them thus is in accord with the common speech of the world. The Way and virtue as Lao-tzu defines them discard humanity and virtue. To speak of them thus is in accord with only the private speech of one man.

The Way of the Chou declined. Confucius died. There was a fire in Ch'in (in 213 B.C. when Confucian texts were destroyed by order of the first emperor of Ch'in). There was the school of the yellow emperor and Lao-tzu in the Han, and Buddhism in the period of the Chin, Wei, Liang and Sui (i.e., between Han and T'ang). As for those who spoke of the Way and virtue, humanity, and righteousness, if they did not enter into the teachings of Yang Chu (an ancient individualist philosopher, dates unknown), then they entered into the teachings of Mo-tzu. If they did not enter into the teachings of Lao-tzu, then they entered into the teachings of the Buddha. Entering into those, they necessarily had to depart from this (i.e., Confucianism). What they entered into they treated as the master; what they departed from they treated as a slave. What they entered into they became attached to; what they departed from they disparaged. Alas! If persons of later times should wish to hear of humanity and righteousness, of the Way and virtue, from whom should they hear of them? The followers of Lao-tzu say, "Confucius was our teacher's disciple." The followers of the Buddha say, "Confucius was our teacher's disciple." Even those who favor Confucius have become so accustomed to hearing this kind of talk that they enjoy this absurdity and belittle themselves, also saying, "Our teacher also has said so!" Not only do they support it in their speech, they also write it in their literary works. Alas! Even if persons of later times should wish to hear of humanity and righteousness, of the Way and virtue, from whom should they seek them? It is extreme! People in their fondness for the unusual do not seek its beginning nor do they follow it to its end. They wish to hear only of the exotic.

Of old, the classes of the people were four (gentlemen, farmers, craftsmen and merchants), but today there are six (the above four plus Taoist and Buddhist clergy). Of old there was one category of

teaching, but today there are three. There is one class of farmers, but six classes who eat grain. There is one class of craftsmen, but six classes who use implements. There is one class of merchants, but six classes who are supplied by them. How then can the people avoid becoming impoverished and turning to banditry?

In ancient times the things that might harm men were many, but then men who were sages arose and they taught them the way of mutual production and nourishment. They made for them lords and teachers, drove away the harmful insects, snakes, birds and beasts, and settled them in the central land (the Yellow River valley). When (the people) were cold they made clothes for them; when they were hungry they made food for them. Dwelling in trees they might fall; dwelling in the earth they might become ill; so (the sages) made houses for them. They created crafts to provide them with tools to use. They created commerce to exchange what they had for what they lacked. They created medicines to save them from premature death. They created burials and sacrifices to extend their sense of gratitude and love. They created propriety to order (the relations between) their former and later generations. They created music to express their pent-up feelings. They created government to limit their laziness. They created punishments to weed out the unruly. People cheated one another, so they created tallies and seals, peck and bushel measures, and balance scales to make them honest. People robbed one another, so they created walled cities, armor, and weapons for them to defend themselves. When harm came, they made preparations against it for them. When troubles arose, they made defenses for them.

Now (the Taoists') words say, "Until the sages die, the great robbers will not stop. Split the peck measures, snap the scales, and the people will not wrangle."<sup>5</sup> Alas! They just do not think, that is all! If in the past there had been no sages mankind would have been annihilated long ago. Why? (Because men) have no feathers or fur, scales or shells to survive the heat and cold; nor have they claws and teeth to contend for food. For this

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<sup>5</sup> A. C. Graham, tr., Chuang-tzu: The Seven Inner Chapters and Other Writings from the Book Chuang-tzu (London: Allen and Unwin: 1981), p. 208.

reason there are lords who issue orders. There are ministers who implement the lord's orders and transmit them to the people. There are the people who produce millet, rice, hemp, and silk, and who make implements and vessels and circulate commodities and money in order to serve their superiors. If the lord does not issue (appropriate) orders, then he will lose that whereby he is a lord. If the minister does not implement the lord's orders and transmit them to the people, or if the people do not produce millet, rice, hemp, and silk, make implements and vessels, and circulate commodities and money in order to serve their superiors, then they are severely punished.<sup>6</sup>

Now (the Buddhists') law says, "You must desert your lord and ministers, get rid of your father and children, prohibit the way of mutual production and nourishment," thereby to seek what they call "purity" and "extinction." Alas! It is both fortunate (for them) that they appeared after the Three Dynasties (Hsia, Shang and Chou, during which the sages lived) so that they were not disgraced by Yü, T'ang, (kings) Wen and Wu, the Duke of Chou, or Confucius, and unfortunate (for us) that they did not appear before the Three Dynasties and so were not corrected by Yü, T'ang, Wen and Wu, the Duke of Chou, or Confucius.

An emperor differs from a (sage) king in name, but that whereby they are sages is the same. (It is like) wearing (garments made of) light cloth in summer and leather in winter, or drinking when thirsty and eating when hungry: as actions they differ, but that whereby they are wise is the same. Now (the Taoists') words say, "Why not emulate antiquity's absence of (organized) affairs?" This is like blaming the one who wears leather garments in winter saying, "Why don't you take the easier way of wearing light cloth (all year round)," or blaming the one who eats when hungry saying, "Why don't you take the easier way of drinking?" The tradition (of the Great Learning in the Record of Rites) says, "The ancients who wished to illustrate illustrious virtue throughout the kingdom, first ordered well their own states. Wishing to order well their states, they first regulated their families. Wishing to regulate their families, they first cultivated their persons. Wishing to cultivate

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<sup>6</sup> On the term chu, see above, p. 126 n. 13.

their persons, they first rectified their hearts. Wishing to rectify their hearts, they first sought to be sincere in their thoughts."<sup>7</sup> Thus what the ancients called rectifying the heart and making their thoughts sincere was for the purpose of taking action. Now, however, (the Taoists and Buddhists) wish to regulate their hearts and put themselves outside the world, the state, and the family. They destroy the constant (principles) of nature. As sons, they do not treat their fathers as fathers. As ministers, they do not treat their lords as lords. As subjects, they do not serve as they should. When Confucius wrote the Spring and Autumn Annals (Ch'un-ch'iu), if the feudal lords used barbarian customs, then he treated them as barbarians. If (the barbarians) had advanced to Chinese customs, then he treated them as Chinese. The Classic (the Analects of Confucius) says, "The barbarians having lords are not the equal of the Chinese without them."<sup>8</sup> The Book of Odes says, "the Jung and Ti (barbarians), these (you should) punish; (the barbarians of) Ching and Shu, these (you should) chastise."<sup>9</sup> Yet today (the Buddhists) take up the ways of the barbarians and raise them above the teachings of our former kings.

Now what is meant by the teachings of the former kings? Universal love which is called humanity. Practicing it in an appropriate way which is called righteousness. To conduct oneself in accordance with these which is called the Way. To be sufficient in oneself without reliance on anything external which is called virtue. Their literature was the Book of Odes, the Book of Documents, the Book of Changes, and the Spring and Autumn Annals. Their methods were rites, music, punishments, and government. Their people were (the classes of) gentlemen, farmers, craftsmen, and merchants. Their status roles were lord and minister, father and son, teacher and friend, guest and host, older brother and younger brother, husband and wife. Their clothing was hemp and silk. Their dwellings were houses and halls. Their food was millet and rice, fruits and vegetables, fish and meat. They created

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<sup>7</sup> Legge, Chinese Classics, vol. 1, pp. 357-358.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Legge, Chinese Classics, vol. 1, p. 156.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Legge, Chinese Classics, vol. 4, p. 626.

a way that was easy to understand. They created teachings that were easy to practice. Therefore, if one applied them to oneself, the result was happiness and good fortune; if one applied them to (relationships with) others, the result was love and unselfishness; if one applied them to the mind, the result was harmony and tranquillity; if one applied them to (the management of) the world, the state, and the family, there was no place where they were not suitable. Therefore, (those who applied these teachings) in life (were able to express) their feelings, in death (they were able to) fully express the constant (quality of their relationships). They offered sacrifices (to Heaven according to these teachings) and the heavenly spirits received them. (They offered sacrifices at) their ancestral temples and the spirits of their ancestors enjoyed them. If someone should ask, "What way is this?" I would reply, This is what I call the Way. It is not the way of the Taoists and Buddhists referred to above. Yao transmitted it to Shun; Shun transmitted it to Yü; Yü transmitted it to T'ang; T'ang transmitted it to Wen and Wu and the Duke of Chou; Wen and Wu and the Duke of Chou transmitted it to Confucius; Confucius transmitted it to Mencius. After the death of Mencius it was no longer transmitted. Hsün-tzu and Yang Hsiung selected (elements) of it, but did not get its essence; they spoke of it, but not in all of its details. Those sages who came before the Duke of Chou were in superior positions as rulers, so they (could express their understanding of the Way through their) conduct of affairs; those who came after the Duke of Chou were in inferior positions as subjects, so they (could only express their understanding of the Way through) talking about it at length.

If this is the case, then what can be done? I say, if (the way of the Buddhists and Taoists) is not blocked, (the Confucian Way) will not continue; if (their way) does not cease, (our way) will not be put into practice. Treat their personnel as (ordinary) persons; burn their books; make their dwellings into ordinary residences. Make clear the Way of the former kings in order to guide them; let widows and widowers, orphans and those who are childless, the sick and the disabled be nourished. This comes close to what can be done.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> HCLC, pp. 7-11.



Han Yü begins his essay by defining the principles that characterize the Confucian Way. In defining humanity, one of the primary Confucian virtues, as universal love (po-ai), Han Yü counters the Buddhist criticism that Confucianism is lacking in compassion. Wing-tsit Chan notes that Han Yü has chosen a term with prior Confucian precedents rather than borrowing a Buddhist term or using the term "mutual love" (chien-ai) which was identified with the school of the ancient philosopher Mo-tzu, a contemporary and rival of Confucius.<sup>11</sup> Han Yü's definition of righteousness as putting universal love into practice in an appropriate way reflects the Confucian view that correct behavior differs according to circumstances and the relationship between the persons involved. Since both the Way and virtue are important terms in both Confucianism and Taoism, Han Yü has to explain how it is possible for the two terms to have different meanings for Confucians and Taoists and why the Confucian meanings are correct. In the next part of the essay he describes the rise of heterodox philosophies and the concurrent decline of Confucianism.

Han Yü then turns his attention to the people's economic distress, which he blames on Taoism and Buddhism. He follows this with a description of the many ways in which

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<sup>11</sup> Wing-tsit Chan, A Sourcebook in Chinese Philosophy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 455.

the Confucian sages showed their concern for all aspects of the people's welfare. Han Yü's view of the primitive nature of ancient Chinese society is similar to Tu Yu's, as is his emphasis on the material well-being of the people. His purpose here is to demonstrate that the contribution of the sages (and the Confucian ideology that they symbolize) was entirely positive and was essential to the survival of mankind and the growth of civilization.

Han Yü's criticism of the Taoists and Buddhists is aimed primarily at the harm they do to the system of values and hierarchical relationships that he believes are necessary for society to function satisfactorily. He quotes the Great Learning (Ta-hsüeh), a text included in one of the Confucian classics, the Record of Rites (Li chi), which later attained independent status as one of the Four Books of Neo-Confucianism. For this reason he has been credited with recognizing the importance of this text at a time when others paid little attention to it. While there may be some truth in this, it is also true that the Li chi was included along with the other Confucian classics as required reading for a standard Confucian education and it was referred to on occasion by other T'ang writers. Han Yü selected this quotation so he could contrast the purpose of Confucian self-cultivation to benefit society with the purposes of Taoist and Buddhist self-cultivation which benefitted only

the self while harming society. This interpretation of the purpose of self-cultivation did become an important characteristic of Neo-Confucianism.

Han Yü also equates Confucianism with Chinese identity and suggests that those who adopt non-Confucian beliefs risk losing their identity as Chinese. The ancient sage kings and their teachings are identified with all that is characteristically Chinese. Moreover, their teachings are easy to understand and easy to practice, unlike the teachings of the Buddhists and Taoists which were known to be difficult to understand and to practice in their more sophisticated forms. These teachings that were so well suited to the conditions of Chinese life consequently brought favorable results wherever they were applied.

A further means of distinguishing the Confucian Way from the ways of its rivals was to trace the transmission of Confucian values through a series of sages who were known to all Chinese as paragons of virtue. The doctrine of the transmission of the Way (tao-t'ung) became another important component of Neo-Confucianism. Han Yü's inclusion of Mencius as the successor to Confucius departed from the conventional T'ang view of Mencius as just one among many philosophers who sought to continue Confucius's teachings.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. Chun-chieh Huang, "Three Interpretations of Mencian Morality in T'ang Times," part 1, Asian Culture Quarterly, vol. 10, no. 2 (summer, 1982), pp. 75, 77.

This view of Mencius also anticipated the important position Mencius would be given in Neo-Confucian thought. Han Yü accounts for the break in the transmission of the Way after the death of Mencius by suggesting that the best thinkers of the period did not fully understand it and that the sages who came after the Duke of Chou were no longer rulers so they could only talk about the Way, unlike the earlier sages who could apply it to their conduct of affairs of state.

Han Yü obviously believes that the Confucian Way can still be revived, but equally obvious is his conviction that it is being seriously threatened by Taoism and Buddhism. The feeling expressed in the conclusion of this essay that Confucianism and its rivals are utterly incompatible is so strong--and so untypical of the T'ang--that one is prompted to wonder whether there might have been some specific incident that provoked such strong emotions in Han Yü.

While we will never know whether there was a particular incident that inspired Han Yü to write his "Inquiry Concerning the Way," we do know the circumstances which prompted him to submit his "Memorial on the Buddha's Bone." Even though some fourteen years or more had passed in the meantime, many of the same concerns evident in the earlier essay are also present here. Foremost among them is the fear that an excess of zeal on the part of the

worshippers of the Buddha might lead them to harm themselves economically or even physically. Since there is a strong possibility that Han Yü had been in the capital to witness the popular response to the previous display of this Buddhist relic, he may have believed his fears to be well founded.

The first part of this memorial appears at first glance to be nothing more than a rather weak polemical argument against Buddhism in general. It consists of a long series of references to Chinese rulers who lived before the arrival of Buddhism in China and points out that they all enjoyed long lives. These are then contrasted with later rulers who died young and whose dynasties did not last long despite their patronage of Buddhism. As we have seen, it was this part of the memorial that most angered the emperor and nearly cost Han Yü his life.

It is possible to explain the emperor's anger in terms of sympathetic magic, a common belief in the premodern world, according to which the mere mention of something inauspicious such as the emperor's early death could actually cause that event to occur. However, the Japanese scholar Kakehi Fumio has drawn attention to other circumstances which may also help to account for this part of Han Yü's memorial and the emperor's reaction to it.

Like many other T'ang emperors, toward the end of his reign Hsien-tsung became interested in the Taoist arts of immortality. On the seventh day of the eleventh month of 818, approximately two months before Han Yü submitted his memorial, Hsien-tsung appointed a Taoist named Liu Pi to the post of acting prefect of T'ai-chou so that he might direct the search for a sacred herb said to grow nearby on mount T'ien-t'ai. Liu Pi failed to find the sacred herb, but thanks to the influence of Huang-fu Po and others he remained close to the emperor and provided him with an elixir to drink. Thereafter, Hsien-tsung began to behave irrationally and punished those who tried to dissuade him from taking the elixir.<sup>13</sup>

It is not clear how far Hsien-tsung's pursuit of Taoist immortality had progressed at the time Han Yü submitted his memorial, but it is likely that Han Yü knew what direction the emperor's interest had taken. If Han Yü believed that Hsien-tsung's patronage of Buddhism was motivated by the hope of gaining personal benefits for himself, such as long life and prosperity, this would explain why he put so much emphasis on the point that patronage of Buddhism had not brought long life or prosperity to Chinese emperors of the past.

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<sup>13</sup> Kakehi Fumio, Kan Yu Ryu Sogen (Han Yü and Liu Tsung-yüan) (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobo, 1973), pp. 140-141.

### Memorial on the Buddha's Bone

Your servant humbly submits that Buddhism is merely a religion of the barbarians. It has been in China (only) since the time of the Later Han dynasty (25-220 A.D.); it did not exist (here) in ancient times. Of old, the Yellow Emperor was on the throne for one hundred years and lived to the age of one hundred and ten. (The Yellow Emperor's son) Shao Hao was on the throne for eighty years and lived to the age of one hundred. (The Yellow Emperor's grandson) Chuan Hsü was on the throne for seventy-nine years and lived to the age of ninety-eight. Emperor K'u (the grandson of Shao Hao) was on the throne for seventy years and lived to the age of one hundred and five. Emperor Yao (the son of emperor K'u) was on the throne for ninety-eight years and lived to the age of one hundred and eighteen. Emperors Shun and Yü both lived to the age of one hundred. At this time the empire was at peace and the people were happy and long-lived, yet there was as yet no Buddhism in China. After this (king) T'ang of the Yin (Shang) dynasty also lived to the age of one hundred. T'ang's grandson T'ai Mou was on the throne for seventy-five years and (his descendant) Wu Ting was on the throne for fifty-nine years. The documents and histories do not mention the length of their lives, but estimating their ages it is probable that both lived for not less than one hundred years. During the Chou dynasty king Wen lived for ninety-seven years and king Wu lived for ninety-three years. King Mu was on the throne for one hundred years. At this time Buddhism had still not yet entered China, so it was not because of (their) serving the Buddha that this came to be so.

Buddhism first appeared in China during the reign of emperor Ming of the Han dynasty (r. 58-76 A.D.). Emperor Ming was on the throne for only eighteen years. After this, disorder and ruin followed one another, and the reigns of the rulers were not long. From the time of the Sung, Ch'i, Liang, Ch'en, and Northern Wei dynasties (i.e., the Period of Disunion), worship of the Buddha gradually increased while reigns were short. Only emperor Wu of the Liang dynasty (r. 502-550) was on the throne for (as long as) forty-eight years. During his reign he donated his body to assist Buddhism (by compelling his ministers to "ransom" him) three times. In the sacrifices at his ancestral temple he

did not use animals and ate only once a day, limiting himself to vegetables and fruits. Despite this, in the end he was forced (from his throne) by Hou Ching (d. 552) and he starved to death at T'ai-ch'eng. His kingdom, too, was soon destroyed. Serving the Buddha in order to seek good fortune, instead he got disaster. From this it can also be seen that the Buddha is not worthy of worship.

When Kao-tsu (first emperor of the T'ang) first assumed the throne on the abdication of the Sui, he discussed eliminating (Buddhism). But the talent and wisdom of the ministers of that time were not extensive and they were not able to understand in depth the way of the former kings, nor of what was appropriate for both the past and the present so that they might have supported the emperor's sagely intelligence and thereby corrected this harmful practice. The idea was thus not carried out, to your servant's constant regret.

I consider that in sagely wisdom, in both civil and military matters, and in divine courage there has been no one to equal your majesty for several thousand years. When you first ascended the throne you did not permit the ordination of new persons as Buddhist monks or nuns or Taoist priests, nor did you permit the establishment of new monasteries or temples. Your servant believed that Kao-tsu's intention would certainly be carried out by your majesty's hand. Even though it might not as yet be possible to implement (this intention) completely, how could it be that you would allow (Buddhism) to spread and cause it to flourish? Now I have heard that your majesty has ordered a group of monks to receive the Buddha's bone at Feng-hsiang, that you will personally observe it from a tower as it enters the imperial palace, and that you have furthermore ordered the various Buddhist temples to welcome it and worship it in turn.

Although your servant is extremely stupid, yet I feel certain that your majesty is not so deluded by Buddhism as to do it this honor for the purpose of gaining blessings or rewards. It is only that the year has been prosperous and the people are joyful, so that you wish to give in to the feelings of the people and so have arranged this strange observance for the amusement of the gentlemen and commoners of the capital. How could one have sagely intelligence such as yours and still believe in this sort of thing?



But the masses of the people are ignorant and dull, easily deluded and difficult to enlighten. If they see your majesty behaving like this they will say that you are sincere in worshipping the Buddha, and they will all say, "The Son of Heaven is a great sage, yet he also whole-heartedly and reverently believes. How can commoners such as we begrudge our bodies or our lives?" They will burn the tops of their heads and singe their fingers (in the ceremonies of becoming monks), and in crowds of tens or hundreds they will cast off their (commoners') clothing and give away their money, from morning to night rushing after one another, only fearing that they might be late. Old and young hurry along, forsaking their occupations and ranks. If you do not issue a prohibition to stop it and the bone is circulated among the various temples, there will certainly be those who will cut off their arms and mutilate their bodies as a form of sacrifice. This would do harm to our moral values and provoke laughter everywhere. It is not an insignificant matter.

Now the Buddha was originally a man of the barbarians. He did not understand the Chinese language; his clothes were of a different style. He did not speak in the manner of (our) former kings, nor was his body clothed in the manner of the former kings. He did not understand the duties of lord and minister nor the feelings of fathers and sons. If he were still alive today and he came to our capital at his country's command, your majesty might be willing to receive him, but only to the extent of granting him an audience, entertaining him at a formal banquet, and giving him a suit of clothing; then you would guard him and escort him to the frontier, not allowing him to delude the masses. How is it then now when he has been dead for so long and his bone is dried out and decayed, that it should be considered appropriate for this filthy and inauspicious remnant (of his body) to enter the imperial palace?

Confucius said, "Respect ghosts and spirits, but keep them at a distance."<sup>14</sup> When the feudal lords of ancient times went to offer condolence within their own states, they still ordered exorcists to precede them with peach-wood wands to

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<sup>14</sup> Analects 6:20; cf. Legge, Chinese Classics, vol. 1, p. 191.

drive away inauspicious influences and only then would they advance to offer their condolence. Now without reason you will fetch this decayed and filthy thing and you will personally observe it. Exorcists will not precede you; the peach-wood wand will not be used. Your ministers do not say that this is wrong; your censors do not point out that this is a mistake. Your servant is truly shamed by this. I beg that you entrust this bone to the proper officials to throw into water or fire so that we may forever break off the roots (of Buddhism) and settle the doubts of the empire, thus preventing the delusion of later generations and causing the people of the empire to know that the accomplishments of a great sage (such as yourself) surpass the ordinary by ten thousand ten thousands. Would it not be glorious? Would it not be joyful?

If the Buddha should really have divine power and the ability to cause calamities and evil, it is fitting that all such misfortune and blame should fall (only) on your servant's person. With Heaven as his witness, your servant would have no regrets. Exceedingly grateful and sincere, Your servant respectfully submits this memorial for your consideration in fear and trepidation.<sup>15</sup>

This text differs somewhat in style from Han Yü's earlier essay. Memorials addressed to the emperor were expected to conform to established stylistic conventions and there were also certain established techniques of persuasion that were particularly applicable in arguments addressed to the emperor. Thus Han Yü praises the emperor's superior wisdom and then suggests that such a wise ruler could not really believe in Buddhism. If the emperor accepts the flattery of the first part of Han Yü's argument it is difficult for him to reject the second part without denying his own wisdom. In reading texts of this kind, it is

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<sup>15</sup> HCLC, pp. 354-356.

important to remember that what appears to be excessive praise of the person to whom the text is addressed may be in part stylistic convention and in part rhetorical technique intended to elicit a positive response to the argument being presented. Beneath the polite flattery, Han Yü is really being quite critical of the emperor.

Making due allowance for the different circumstances in which they were composed, the two texts translated in this chapter do exhibit an obvious consistency in Han Yü's point of view over a long period of time. However, before drawing any final conclusions about Han Yü's values we should look at some of his other writings on related subjects.

## CONFUCIAN ORTHODOXY AND POLITICAL REALITY:

### THE LIMITS OF HAN YÜ'S CONSERVATISM

If one were to evaluate Han Yü's thought solely on the basis of the texts translated in the preceding chapter, it might seem that his commitment to Confucianism compelled him to reject entirely all thought that was not purely Confucian. Such a conclusion would not be entirely accurate, however, as an examination of some of his other writings reveals.

In his essay "On Reading Hsün-tzu" (Tu Hsün), Han Yü notes that he gained a greater appreciation of the teachings of Confucius from reading Mencius and thought for a time that Mencius was the only one left who respected the sages after the passing of the disciples of Confucius. Then he obtained the works of the Han scholar Yang Hsiung and found that Yang also appreciated the teachings of Confucius and led Han Yü to a greater respect for Mencius.

At this point he decided that the works of Mencius and Yang Hsiung were the only "pure" Confucian works that survived after the burning of the books by the Ch'in and the flourishing of Huang-Lao Taoism in the early years of the Han. But then he obtained a copy of the works of Hsün-tzu,

who had previously been unknown to him. Although at times Hsün-tzu's words seemed impure, in the end Han Yü concluded that the points on which Hsün-tzu differed from Confucius were minor and that he probably belonged somewhere between Mencius and Yang Hsiung.

In deciding how to handle the points where Hsün-tzu differed from Confucius, Han Yü proposed to follow the method which he believed Confucius had followed in editing the Book of Odes and the Book of Documents and in compiling the Spring and Autumn Annals. "What was in agreement with the Way, he included; what departed from the Way, he omitted. Therefore, the Book of Odes, the Book of Documents, and the Spring and Autumn Annals are without flaws." Applying this technique to the works of Hsün-tzu, "I would like to excise from Hsün-tzu that which is not in agreement (with the Way), and attach (the remainder) to the books of the sages. Was this not also the intention of Confucius?" In conclusion, Han Yü reaffirms his high opinion of Mencius while also giving due credit to Hsün-tzu and Yang Hsiung. "Mencius was the purest of the pure; Hsün-tzu and Yang Hsiung were for the most part pure but had minor defects."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> HCLC, pp. 20-21; tr. Liu, Chinese Classical Prose, p. 43.

Hsün-tzu is usually classified as a Confucian, albeit one with Legalist tendencies, so Han Yü's attitude toward him is not too surprising. Rather less to be expected, given his reputation as a Confucian purest, is Han Yü's sympathetic attitude toward Mo-tzu, who was once an important rival of Confucius. Referring to several chapters of the Mo-tzu that had frequently been the object of ridicule by Confucian scholars, Han Yü finds that they do not differ greatly from doctrines attributed to Confucius. In "On Reading Mo-tzu" (Tu Mo), he gives examples of what seem to be points of agreement between the doctrines of Confucius and Mo-tzu. The chapter titles from Mo-tzu are cited according to the translation of Y.P. Mei.

#### On Reading Mo-tzu

Confucians ridicule the chapters of the Mo-tzu entitled "Identification with the Superior," "Universal Love," Exaltation of the Virtuous," and "On Ghosts." Yet Confucius respected great men. "Residing in this country, do not criticize its great officers,"<sup>2</sup> and the Spring and Autumn Annals' ridiculing tyrannical ministers--are they not "identifying with the superior"? Confucius spread love and made humanity his intimate, and took it as sagely to provide liberal aid to assist the masses--was this not "universal love"? Confucius respected the worthy. He used (the system of ranking in) four classes to advance and reward his disciples, and he said, "(The superior man) dislikes the thought of his name not being mentioned after

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<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Hsün-tzu chi-chieh (Hsün-tzu with collected annotations), ed. Wang Hsien-ch'ien (Taipei: Yi-wen yin-shu kuan, 1977), ch. 20, p. 9a.

his death."<sup>3</sup> Is this not "exaltation of the virtuous"? Confucius sacrificed as though (the spirits of the dead) were present, and he ridiculed those who did not perform the sacrifice personally,<sup>4</sup> saying, "My sacrifice will then bring good fortune" (this is not part of the quotation from the Analects)--is this not (the sentiment expressed in the chapter) "on ghosts"?

Confucians and Mohists alike express approval of Yao and Shun, and they are alike in condemning (the evil rulers) Chieh and Chou (last rulers of the Hsia and Shang dynasties), and alike in cultivating their bodies and rectifying their minds in order to regulate the empire, the state, and the family. How is it that they are not fond of one another then? I think that the dispute arose among inferior scholars who each took it as his responsibility to promote the theories of his own teacher. The ways of two teachers could not both be fundamentally correct. This being so, Confucians necessarily had to treat Mohists as inferior and Mohists necessarily had to treat Confucians as inferior. If they did not treat one another as inferiors, they did not (consider themselves) adequate to be Confucians and Mohists.<sup>5</sup>

This is a more tolerant attitude than we have come to expect from Han Yü. Also somewhat unexpected is his admission in another essay that he finds the classic On Ceremonial and Ritual (Yi-li) difficult to read and apply in contemporary circumstances. He says, "I have felt troubled that the Yi-li is so difficult to read. Moreover, its practice at the present time is quite limited. The traditions (regarding it) are different, so there is no source from which to restore it. Investigating it at the

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<sup>3</sup> Analects 15:19; tr. Legge, Chinese Classics, vol. 1, p. 300.

<sup>4</sup> Analects 3:12; tr. Legge, vol. 1, p. 159.

<sup>5</sup> HCLC, pp. 22-23.

present time, there is really no way to use it." He expresses the belief that the details of the institutions of the sages have long been lost and all that can be known is their general principles. Its profound themes and unfamiliar words have been written in books where they can be studied by scholars, but where, he implies, they are not used for guidance in actual ceremonies and rituals. He regrets this situation, saying, "It is a pity that I cannot reach back into their time to associate with them and participate in their ceremonies."<sup>6</sup>

Han Yü recognized as well that there was room for interpretation in the teachings of Confucius and that this could lead to differing approaches to Confucian doctrines. In a preface sent to a recipient of the chin-shih degree named Wang Hsün, he says, "I have often considered that the way of Confucius is great and can be broadened (i.e., interpreted by extension, po). His disciples could not observe all aspects of it and understand it completely, so when they studied it they all obtained what was near to their own natures. Afterwards (i.e., after their master's death), when they had dispersed to reside separately among the feudal states, again each taught his disciples according to his own ability and as they became more distant from the origin, the branches (of Confucian thought) became

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<sup>6</sup> HCLC, p. 22.



increasingly differentiated." Han Yü then explains why he prefers the branch of Confucian learning associated with Mencius: "Meng K'o (Mencius) took as his teacher Tzu-ssu (the grandson of Confucius). Tzu-ssu's learning surely came from Tseng-tzu (Tseng Shen, a direct disciple of Confucius and reputed author of the Classic of Filial Piety). After the death of Confucius there was no one among his disciples who did not have writings, but only those transmitted by Meng K'o were of his ancestry. Therefore, since I was young I have enjoyed reading in them."<sup>7</sup>

Despite his respect for Mencius, Han Yü did not agree with every aspect of his thought. A notable point of difference between them is their approach to human nature. Mencius's view, which ultimately became the standard for Confucians, was that human nature is inherently good and needs only to be properly nurtured and developed. This contrasted with the view of Hsün-tzu that human nature is bad, in the sense that each man tends to seek what benefits himself rather than what benefits society as a whole, but that this tendency could be overcome through education. A third view that was common in Han Yü's time was that of the Buddhists, whose emphasis on the ultimately unsatisfactory nature of human existence must have appeared to a Confucian such as Han Yü to be a very negative view of human nature.

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<sup>7</sup> HCLC, pp. 152-153.

In his essay "An Inquiry Concerning Human Nature" (Yüan hsing), Han Yü suggests that human nature should be classified into three grades: purely good, purely bad, and medium, which can be led to become either good or bad. As Professor Wing-tsit Chan has pointed out, similar theories had been proposed by earlier scholars such as Wang Ch'ung (27-100?) and Hsün Yüeh (148-209).<sup>8</sup> Han Yü does not mention either of these scholars, although it is certainly possible that he was familiar with their views. He does make reference to the views of Mencius and Hsün-tzu referred to above, as well as the opinion of Yang Hsiung that man's nature is a mixture of good and evil. Han Yü argues that all of these interpretations apply only to the medium grade of human nature while ignoring the superior and inferior grades. To justify his system of classification, he cites examples from ancient Chinese history of individuals who fit into each of his three categories.

Parallel with his theory of three grades of human nature, which he believes to be present already at birth, Han Yü also postulates a theory of three grades of feelings or emotions (ch'ing). Unlike human nature (hsing), these feelings are not present at birth but arise in response to contact with external things. The three grades of human nature are classified with reference to the Five Constant

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<sup>8</sup> Chan, Sourcebook, pp. 453-454.

Virtues of Confucianism, while the three grades of feelings are classified with reference to seven emotions. Han Yü explains his system of classification as follows (in Wing-tsit Chan's translation):

Human nature consists in five virtues, namely, humanity (jen), propriety (li), faithfulness, righteousness (i), and wisdom. In the superior grade, one of these five is the ruling factor while the other four also are practiced. In the medium grade, there is more or less of one of the five while the other four are not pure. In the inferior grade, one rebels against one of these and is out of accord with the other four. The relation of nature to feelings depends on its grade....what constitute the feelings are seven: pleasure, anger, sorrow, fear, love, hate, and desire. In the superior grade, when any of these seven becomes active, it abides by the Mean. In the medium grade, some of the seven are excessive and some are deficient but there is an effort to be in accord with the Mean. In the inferior grade, whether they are excessive or deficient, action is directed by whichever feeling happens to be predominant.<sup>9</sup>

The critical difference in classification is clearly whether one allows one's behavior to be governed by one's emotions or by ethical considerations. This determines the method by which persons in the two categories may be most effectively influenced. "The nature of the superior grade

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<sup>9</sup> Chan, Sourcebook, p. 452.

becomes more intelligent through education. The nature of the inferior grade comes to have few faults through an awe of power. Therefore the superior nature can be taught and the inferior nature can be controlled."<sup>10</sup>

We do not know the specific circumstances in which Han Yü developed this concept, but it is tempting to speculate that he had specific individuals in mind when he proposed the superior and inferior categories. It is not characteristic of Han Yü to engage in abstract philosophizing for its own sake, whereas he consistently shows a deep concern over the way contemporary human behavior is affected by ethical values or their absence.

This concern figures prominently in his essay, "An Inquiry Concerning Slander" (Yüan hui) in which he criticizes gentlemen of his own time for demanding little of themselves but much of others. He contrasts this with the attitude of the great men of the past who were demanding of themselves but lenient toward others. He laments that the great men of his time are too lazy to develop good qualities in themselves and jealous of those who do try to develop such qualities. This leads them to ignore the good points and accomplishments of others and to concentrate instead on someone else's defects and failures. The result is that accomplishment and virtue bring only defamation and slander.

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<sup>10</sup> Chan, Sourcebook, p. 453; HCLC, pp. 11-13.

It is not difficult to see in this essay a reflection of Han Yü's frustrations as he sought to advance himself in T'ang politics.<sup>11</sup>

Although the issues of human nature and self-cultivation that Han Yü discusses in these essays were also major concerns of the Neo-Confucian philosophers of the Sung, Han Yü's treatment of these issues is quite different in its practical emphasis with only a minimum of abstract theory. Even when it appears at first that Han Yü is going to engage in philosophical discourse, he soon turns the discussion in a practical direction. This may be seen, for example, in his essay "An Inquiry Concerning Man" (Yüan jen):

#### An Inquiry Concerning Man

That which has form above is called Heaven. That which has form below is called earth. That which lives between these two is called man. What has form above (such as) the sun, moon, and the stars, all (belong to the category of) Heaven. That which has form below (such as) plants, trees, mountains, and rivers, all (belong to the category of) earth. That which lives between these two (such as) the Yi and Ti barbarians, birds, and beasts, all (belong to the category of) man. Someone said, "If this is so, then I might call birds and beasts men. Would this be permissible?" I said, "It would not." If someone were to point to a mountain and ask of it, "Is it a mountain?" and if I replied, "It is a mountain," that would be permissible. (However), mountains have plants, trees, birds, and beasts, all of which they support. If someone were to point to

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<sup>11</sup> HCLC, pp. 13-14; tr. by Rideout in Anthology of Chinese Literature, pp. 255-257; Liu, Chinese Classical Prose, pp. 31-33; Spring, Tang Guwen, pp. 380-391.

a plant on a mountain and ask, "Is it a mountain?" and if I were to reply, "It is a mountain," then that would not be permissible.

When the way of Heaven is disordered, the sun, the moon, and the stars do not obtain their (proper) movements. When the way of earth is disordered, plants and trees, mountains and rivers do not obtain their (proper) level. When the way of man is disordered, the Yi and Ti barbarians, the birds and beasts, do not obtain their (proper) feelings.

Heaven is the master of the sun, the moon, and the stars. Earth is the master of plants, trees, mountains, and rivers. Man (i.e., civilized men=Chinese) is the master of the Yi and Ti barbarians, the birds and the beasts. But if he treats them cruelly, man does not obtain the way of being a master. Therefore, the sages saw them all as one and treated them all humanely. They were serious with those who were near (i.e., more civilized) and raised up those who were distant (i.e., less civilized).<sup>12</sup>

What appears at first to be an essay on the place of man in the universe turns out instead to be a plea for humane treatment of those over whom (Chinese) man has dominion. Han Yü does not challenge the concept that the Chinese are superior to barbarians as man is superior to birds and beasts, nor does he in other contexts question the established status relationships that characterized T'ang society. Nonetheless, the attitude toward barbarians displayed in this essay certainly appears to be less hostile than the attitude displayed in "An Inquiry Concerning the Way" and the "Memorial on the Buddha's Bone."

Han Yü's interest in man in human society rather than man in the universe is consistent with the attitude

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<sup>12</sup> HCLC, p. 15.

displayed by early Confucianism where the emphasis is also on ethical relationships in human society. Unlike the Confucians of the Han and the Period of Disunion, Confucius had little apparent interest in questions that did not relate to human behavior and human relationships. While Confucius did not deny the existence of a spiritual world, he seldom mentioned it. His attitude was expressed succinctly in his definition of wisdom: "Serve men with righteousness; respect ghosts and spirits, but keep them at a distance."<sup>13</sup> Han Yü is more willing to talk about ghosts, but his emphasis is still on human behavior in this world, as shown in his essay "An Inquiry Concerning Ghosts" (Yüan kuei).

#### An Inquiry Concerning Ghosts

(Someone said,) "There was a whistling in the rafters. I responded to it and shone candle<sup>^^</sup>light on it, but saw nothing. Was this a ghost?" I replied, "It was not. Ghosts have no sound." (Someone said,) "There was something standing on the (roof of) the hall. I responded to it and looked for it, but saw nothing. Was this a ghost?" I replied, "It was not. Ghosts have no form." (Someone said,) "Something bumped into my body. I responded to it and tried to grasp it, but didn't get it. Was this a ghost?" I replied, "It was not. Ghosts have no sound and no form. How could they have substance (ch'i)?" (Someone said,) "Ghosts have no sound. They have no form. They have no substance. Does that mean there are no ghosts?" I replied, "There are things that have form but no sound, such as earth and stone. There are things that have sound but no form, such as wind and thunder. There are things that have both sound and

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<sup>13</sup> Analects 6:20; cf. Legge, vol. 1, p. 191.

form, such as men and animals. There are things that have no sound and no form, such as ghosts and spirits." (Someone) said, "If that is so, then if there is something strange that comes in contact with people or things, what might it be?" I replied, "Such things are of two kinds. There are ghosts and there are physical things. Those that are vague, without form and without sound are commonly ghosts. When among the people there is disobedience to Heaven and evil toward other people, when there is failure with regard to physical things and (actions) contrary to behavioral norms, this stimulates a response in matter (ch'i) and thereupon ghosts take form and respond to (this stimulus) with sounds and by sending down disasters and calamities. All of this is caused by people. That this is so is (because) there is also something contrary to what is normal (in the spirit world as in the human world). (Someone) said, "What are the physical things (that might account for strange occurrences)?" I replied, "(They are) those which are constituted of forms and sounds, such as earth and stone, wind and thunder, men and beasts; the opposite of those without sound or form, such as ghosts and spirits. Those that cannot (be consistently defined as) having form and sound or not having form and sound are (classified as) strange physical things. Therefore, when they occur and come in contact with people there is no regularity. Consequently, they may act among the people and bring calamity or they may act among the people and bring good fortune, or they may act among the people and bring neither calamity nor good fortune. This fits the situation of the people at present, (therefore) I wrote 'An Inquiry Concerning Ghosts'."14

Like Confucius, Han Yü does not deny the existence of ghosts and spirits. However, neither does he admit that they can exist independently. He asserts that they are created as a result of an abnormality in the human world which creates a corresponding abnormality in the spirit

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14 HCLC, pp. 15-16.



world. Han Yü is more willing than Confucius to discuss such matters, and his attitude is significantly less respectful toward spirits than that of Confucius.

In pieces such as "Farewell to Misfortune," he is obviously using imaginary spirits in which he does not really believe to advance a particular argument or point of view. He is equally willing to use figures from popular folk religion, such as the god of the wind, for satirical purposes in a piece such as "Against the God of the Wind" (Sung feng-po), where the god represents the official Li Shih (the metropolitan governor mentioned previously) who insisted on continuing to collect taxes in a bad year even though the emperor was willing to remit them.<sup>15</sup> Liu Tsung-yüan even attributes to him an attitude toward Heaven that suggests a hostile relationship between Heaven and man.<sup>16</sup>

While it is possible to find inconsistencies in Han Yü's attitude toward the supernatural over a period of time, this only tends to confirm that in normal circumstances he did not take spirits very seriously. This clearly sets him

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<sup>15</sup> HCLC, pp. 35-36; cf. tr. by Rideout in Anthology of Chinese Literature, p. 250, and introductory comment, p. 243.

<sup>16</sup> See the discussion by H. G. Lamont in "An Early Ninth Century Debate on Heaven," part II, Asia Major, vol. 19, pt. 1 (1974), pp. 37-45.

apart from those of his contemporaries for whom such matters were both real and very important.

There can be no doubt that religion played a major role in the lives of many citizens of T'ang China and that they did take seriously the existence of a spiritual realm beyond this world. As we have seen previously, even many of Han Yü's colleagues in the ku-wen literature movement continued to have an interest in either Taoism or Buddhism or both. Even Liu Tsung-yüan, who was skeptical about many aspects of traditional thought and values, still found an interest in Buddhist philosophy.

In this environment Han Yü could not avoid coming in contact with Buddhists and Taoists and, as we have seen, he did not avoid associating with others simply because of their religious beliefs. His most stringent criticism was directed toward institutionalized religion in general rather than toward particular individuals. As we have also seen, he was particularly critical of those aspects of religion which he believed would be economically or physically harmful to the people, either directly or indirectly. Where religion was a matter of individual belief which did no harm to anyone else he could be more tolerant.

An example of this more tolerant attitude toward individuals is found in a poem which Han Yü wrote for a Buddhist priest during his stay at Yang-shan in 804-805.

Near the conclusion of "Seeing Off Reverend Hui" (Sung Hui-shih), Han Yü says (in Stephen Owen's translation):

I think the Western Teaching is wrong,  
but love your passion and purity.  
I loath lazy wanderers,  
but love your simplicity and resolution.<sup>17</sup>

Han Yü is able to appreciate Reverend Hui as an individual even though he disapproves of the "Western Religion" (Buddhism). This ability to distinguish between an individual and his religious beliefs is also apparent in Han Yü's friendship with the poet Chia Tao (779-849), who was a Taoist priest with the name Wu-pen at the time when Han Yü met him.

A further example is Han Yü's friendship with the monk Ta-tien during his exile in Ch'ao-chou immediately after his criticism of Buddhism in the "Memorial on the Buddha's Bone" in 819. It may be significant in this context that Ta-tien was a Ch'an monk, since of all the schools of Buddhism active in China at that time Ch'an was probably least guilty of the abuses that prompted Han Yü's disapproval.

The seeming contradiction between Han Yü's condemnation of Buddhism and Taoism in some contexts and his friendship with individual Buddhists and Taoists may also be explained as reflecting different aspects of his

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<sup>17</sup> HCLS, pp. 91-94; tr. Owen, Meng Chiao and Han Yü, pp. 92-94.

personality. On the one hand, his Confucian training led him to associate his status as a member of a hereditary elite with a sense of responsibility for the welfare of the masses of the people--a sort of noblesse oblige. In this context Buddhism and Taoism were harmful to society because they diverted human and economic resources that were needed to ensure the well-being of the people and the state, and because they tended to undermine the social relationships that Confucians considered essential to the harmonious functioning of society. It seems likely that, to some extent at least, Han Yü's sense of self-worth derived from his image of himself as a defender of values that were necessary for the preservation of civilization as he knew it.

On the other hand, Han Yü was naturally gregarious and enjoyed the company of educated companions who could converse with him on the same intellectual level. While he naturally gravitated toward those whose views were similar to his own, his interests were broad enough to allow him to form friendships with persons whose interests and values were not identical to his. It was his recognition of their literary and intellectual talent that led him to form friendships with Chia Tao and Ta-tien despite his disagreement with their religious beliefs.

Furthermore, in defining Confucianism he seems to have come very close to equating it with traditional Chinese values in general. Confucianism did, of course, incorporate many values and attitudes that had long been characteristic of the Chinese people, so Han Yü was not without justification in viewing it in this way. This is how it was possible for him to find so much in the Mo-tzu that was compatible with Confucianism, for it arose in the same social environment as Confucianism and consequently shared many of the same basic values.

While Han Yü's interpretation of Confucianism was broader than that of many of his spiritual successors in the Neo-Confucian movement, it was narrower than that of many of his contemporaries. Han Yü believed that members of the hereditary elite which had long provided political leadership for Chinese society should, as a matter of course, cultivate in themselves those Confucian values which had in the past proved effective in preserving the security and material well-being of the Chinese people. He believed further that selection of officials for public office should be based on mastery of Confucian principles and not solely on hereditary status or personal connections.

This view was contrary to the way the T'ang political system actually worked, and consequently Han Yü felt a great deal of frustration with the system, especially

in the early years of his career. He was constantly forced to make compromises between his Confucian values and the practical necessity of getting a job to support himself and his extended family. The only suitable employment for a young man of his background was as a government official, and in order to get and keep such a position he had to deal with senior officials whose values were not necessarily the same as his.

A large part of the difficulty Han Yü experienced in obtaining official employment was very likely due to his insistence on adhering to his idealistic Confucian values even when it was not to his advantage to do so. His self-confidence must have appeared to many as arrogance, the more so because he was never very skillful at personal diplomacy. Although his letters to the chief minister asking for employment have been criticized for being excessively subservient, Han Yü may well have appeared to the chief minister as a presumptuous young man trying to tell the chief minister how to do his job.

Although Han Yü learned from practical experience as an official, his idealism never completely disappeared. One might compare, for example, the very practical arguments he advances in his memorial on the reform of the salt administration submitted in 822, and the mixture of

practical concerns with Confucian idealism in his "Memorial on the Buddha's Bone" written three years earlier in 819.

While it is apparent that he was not always suited to the duties to which he was assigned, the succession of high posts which Han Yü held in his later years suggests that he did have some administrative ability. He does seem to have taken his official duties seriously and to have felt a genuine concern for the people over whom he had authority, as evidenced by the various reforms he implemented throughout his career.

His hopes for bringing about an improvement in contemporary political and economic conditions did not rest on a program of radical reforms, but rather on persuading political leaders, including the emperor, to commit themselves to Confucian values and to recognizing their responsibility for the welfare of the people. To be sure, Han Yü was not alone in caring about the people's welfare. A similar concern may be seen, for example, in the "new Yüeh-fu" poems of Po Chü-i and Yüan Chen. However, Han Yü's approach to the problem of achieving political change through altering the mental outlook of the ruling class was to prove more effective in the long run.

One of the essential preconditions for improving political and economic conditions was the preservation of China as a single political unit. For Han Yü this was

possible only within the context of a hereditary monarchy. While he recognized that ideally the ruler should be the most worthy person available, he realized that the alternative to a strong monarchy was likely to be chaos. He discussed this issue in an essay which takes up a question raised in the Mencius<sup>18</sup> regarding the legendary emperor Yü, the founder of the Hsia dynasty, who passed the throne on to his son at his death rather than to a worthy, but unrelated, person as his predecessors Yao and Shun had done.

#### A Question Concerning Yü

Someone asked, "Yao and Shun transmitted (the throne) to a worthy person, while Yü transmitted it to his son. Do you believe it?" I replied, "It is so." "If it is so, then was it because Yü was not as worthy as Yao and Shun?" I replied, "No. Yao and Shun's transmitting it to worthy persons was because they desired what was best for the empire. Yü's transmitting it to his son was due to his concern for the disorder that would result if later generations were to contend for it. Yao and Shun's benefitting the people was great; Yü's concern for the people was also profound."

(Someone) said, "If this is so, then how is it that Yao and Shun did not worry about later generations?" I replied, "Shun was like Yao, so Yao transmitted it to him. Yü was like Shun, so Shun transmitted it to him. Yao and Shun were ones who found a suitable person and transmitted (the throne) to him. Yü was one who did not have a suitable person and worried about the troubles (that might result if the wrong person were selected), so he did not transmit it (to someone outside his family). If Shun had not been able to transmit it to Yü, then (this would mean that) Yao (from whom he received the throne) did not know (how to judge) men. If Yü had not been able to transmit it to his son, then

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<sup>18</sup> Mencius, bk. 5, pt. 2, ch. 6; cf. Legge, Chinese Classics, vol. 2, p. 358.



(this would mean that) Shun did not know (how to judge) men. Yao transmitted it to Shun because of his concern for later generations; Yü's transmitted it to his son because of his concern for later generations."

(Someone) said, "Yü's concern was profound, then, so he transmitted it to his son; but what if his son had not been good enough for the position?" I replied, "The times were increasingly difficult to manage. If he had transmitted it to someone else and there had been a struggle (for the throne, the empire) would not have had its previous stability. If he transmitted it to his son, there would be no struggle and (the empire would still enjoy its) previous stability. If its previous stability were preserved, even though (the ruler) was not (completely) worthy, it would still be possible to preserve order. If its previous stability were not preserved and no worthy ruler was obtained, then there would be struggle and disorder. Heaven does not produce many great sages, but neither does it produce many great evils. One might transmit it to someone and get a great sage, and then no one would dare to struggle (for the throne); or, one might transmit it to someone and get a great evil, then people would suffer the resulting disorder. Four hundred years after Yü there was (the evil ruler) Chieh; also four hundred years later there were T'ang (the virtuous founder of the Shang dynasty) and (the virtuous minister) Yi Yin. Yü could not wait for T'ang and Yi Yin so he could transmit it to them. If he transmitted it (to someone else) who was not a sage the result would be struggle and disorder, so was it not better to transmit it to his son? Even if he were not worthy, it would still be possible to preserve order."

(Someone) said, "What about Mencius's statement, 'When Heaven gave (the throne) to a worthy person, it was given to (that) worthy person; when Heaven gave it to the son (of the previous ruler), then it was given to the son'?" I replied, "In his heart Mencius believed that a sage would not improperly show favor to his son, thereby harming the empire. I sought an explanation of this statement, and not finding one I composed these words (to explain it)."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> HCLC, pp. 17-18.

Han Yü recognizes that hereditary rulers may not always be worthy, but believes that the stability that results from continuity of political leadership is preferable to the chaos that would result if there were a struggle for the throne at the end of each reign. This belief in the importance of political stability also accounts for his support for a strong monarchy, a position that has drawn criticism from some modern scholars.

It must be remembered, however, that neither democracy nor socialism were available as political alternatives in Han Yü's time. The most likely alternatives to a unified empire were either a return to some form of feudalism such as had prevailed during the Chou dynasty, or the breakup of the empire into a number of competing kingdoms--an alternative that became reality during the period of the Five Dynasties (907-960) following the formal end of the T'ang dynasty.

Observation of the chaotic political conditions of the recent past was certainly a major factor in convincing Han Yü of the need for a unified empire under a strong monarch, held together by the "cement" of a common ideology which would assure the commitment of the ruling elite to the welfare of the ruled, and which would minimize the sort of political factionalism that had so often limited the effectiveness of the central government.

## CONCLUSION

Much in Han Yü's thought can be seen to relate to the two goals of political stability for the state and recognition for himself. Although the second goal was a personal one, Han Yü tended (as did other Chinese writers in similar situations) to universalize his personal problems. His own difficulty in obtaining the recognition that he thought he deserved thus came to symbolize a more general problem shared by men of talent in T'ang China.

While the problems relating to the attainment of these two goals were complex, Han Yü paid particular attention to one problem that seemed to him to underlie all of the others. This was the apparent loss of a sense of shared values which had formerly united the Chinese people and given order to their social and political relationships. The diversity reflected in the differing value systems of Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism certainly contributed to the cultural brilliance of the T'ang, but they also made it more difficult to define a common ground on which to rebuild the Chinese state after its near collapse during the rebellion of An Lu-shan.

Han Yü's attraction to Confucianism as a means of dealing with the problems of his time was undoubtedly due in part to his personal background. Another factor may well have been certain similarities between his own time and the Eastern Chou dynasty (770-256 B.C.) during which Confucius and the other classical thinkers lived. In that time, as in Han Yü's time, a theoretically unified state was being fragmented as regional leaders flaunted the authority of the nominal ruler and his administration. Confucius, like Han Yü, was born into a hereditary elite which had traditionally provided the officials for the Chou state and its vassals. He was, therefore, qualified by birth to hold office, but Confucius--again like Han Yü--had great difficulty in obtaining recognition of his abilities and appointment to an official position.

While others advanced to high positions due to their skill in political maneuvering, Confucius insisted that the best way to restore order and harmony to Chinese society was by stressing traditional ethical values which he identified with the legendary sage rulers of earlier dynasties and with the founders of the Chou. In Confucius's view, officials should be chosen primarily for their mastery of ethical values rather than because of their birth or their special political skills (of course, this would make Confucius eminently qualified for office). Confucius did not claim to

be a social revolutionary, asserting that he was merely a transmitter of traditional values. Nevertheless, the effect of his teachings and his personal behavior (he accepted students without regard for their hereditary status) tended to undermine the foundations of the aristocratic society of his time.

It is not difficult to understand how Han Yü might have seen the teachings of Confucius and his school to be particularly relevant to the problems of the T'ang. There were, however, differences between the two periods which may help to account for the differences between Han Yü's thought and the ideas of Confucius and Mencius.

The decline in the power and authority of the T'ang central government was not nearly as great as the decline of the Chou government in Confucius's time. Neither were the military governors of the T'ang as strong as the leading regional powers of the late Chou, who acted for all practical purposes as independent states. The T'ang emperor retained sufficient power and prestige that a reasonable man might still conclude that the restoration of conditions previous to the rebellion of An Lu-shan was a practical possibility.

Moreover, the T'ang examination system, despite its flaws, showed that the state recognized the importance of the principle (at least) that officials ought to be chosen

according to some objective standard of ability. Han Yü's experiences demonstrate the weaknesses of the system as it existed in the T'ang, and show why it was changed in the Sung to eliminate the worst abuses of the T'ang. However, we should not forget that despite all his frustrations Han Yü did have a relatively successful career as an official.

This is an important point of difference between Han Yü and Confucius (and Mencius, as well). Over a period of nearly thirty years, Han Yü served in a variety of official positions, rising to the rank of vice-minister, a level that most officials never reached. Indeed, it is conceivable that had Han Yü lived longer he might have risen even higher in rank. This practical experience as an administrator differentiates him from Confucius and Mencius, neither of whom held an important political office for any significant length of time, and draws attention to an important aspect of Han Yü's thought.

There is in Han Yü's thought a mixture of idealism and practicality. This is quite possibly why he looked so favorably on the philosophy of Hsün-tzu, for here, too, there is an emphasis on the application of Confucian principles in situations where social conditions fall short of the expectations of Mencian idealism. Han Yü clearly respected the ideals of Confucius and Mencius, but given the political conditions of his lifetime he may well have found

it difficult to accept Mencius's premise that all men are by nature good. Thus, in "An Inquiry Concerning Human Nature" Han Yü expresses the belief that some men must be compelled to be good.

Modern scholars recognize that traditional Chinese systems of thought are not monolithic entities, but contain within them a range of different approaches to the fundamental principals of each school of thought. Han Yü seems at times to move toward the Legalist pole within Confucianism, such as in his ideas concerning human nature, or regarding the need for control of the state by a strong central authority. Yet, he remains a true Confucian because the reason for such Legalistic-sounding ideas is not for the sake of the state, but for the sake of the people. In this context, one is reminded of Arthur Waley's description of the Legalists (fa-chia) as Realists who insisted that theories of government must deal with the world as it really is.<sup>1</sup>

Regarding the problem of political stability, Han Yü agreed with the idealistic view that the emperor should be a person of superior virtue dedicated to the welfare of his people, and that the people should respect and obey the emperor and his representatives because they recognized

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Waley, Three Ways of Thought in Ancient China (1939; reprint New York: Anchor Books, n.d.), p. 151.

their superior virtue. At the same time, Han Yü recognized that present conditions fell short of this ideal, and he advocated strengthening the authority of the emperor and the use of military force against rebels when persuasion failed. As an official, he punished offenders according to the law when he considered it appropriate to do so. This was essentially consistent with the general Confucian attitude toward law and punishment in imperial China, which was that the best way to regulate society was through universally accepted (in China) moral standards, and that law and punishments should be invoked only when these moral standards were violated.<sup>2</sup>

The practical side of Han Yü's mind led him to accept the need for coercive measures in some circumstances, but the idealistic side told him that such circumstances represented an aberration, a departure from what ought to be the norm. Preferable to the use of force was ideological indoctrination based on common values which were recognized as legitimate by the majority of the Chinese people. If the values identified as "Confucian" were really universally accepted in China, there would be no need for coercive measures because each person (including the ruler) would play his role in society with sincerity and diligence, and

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Ch'ü T'ung-tsu, Law and Society in Traditional China (Paris and The Hague: Mouton, 1965), p. 283.



all would interact according to a set of rules which were understood and accepted by all.

Han Yü recognized that this ideal situation was not immediately attainable, but believed that it represented the best hope for a long-term solution to China's problems. It was also advantageous for him personally. If the teachings of Confucius and Mencius were to be acknowledged as essential to the welfare of society, then as a teacher who thought of himself as the successor to Confucius and Mencius, Han Yü could expect to play a pivotal role in the transformation of Chinese values. In the legendary past, it had been the sage kings who preserved and transmitted the set of values now identified as "Confucian." It was, therefore, a source of pride for Han Yü and those who followed in his footsteps to think that they were now fulfilling this duty as the present-day surrogates of the former kings.

Han Yü has never been accused of excessive modesty, and his image of himself as a sort of latter-day Confucius did elicit scornful laughter from some of his contemporaries. This does not necessarily mean, however, that his advocacy of Confucian values was merely self-serving. He appears to have been quite sincere in his desire to benefit the people, and his most extreme ideological views, as expressed in the essay "An Inquiry into the Way" and the

"Memorial on the Buddha's Bone," are belied by his conduct in real-life situations.

Han Yü considered Buddhism and Taoism undesirable because they were economically harmful to society, and because they were obstacles to the re-establishment of a set of common values that could be used to re-unify Chinese society. In his personal relations with individual Buddhists and Taoists, however, Han Yü seems to have been governed primarily by his perception of their personal qualities and the sincerity of their beliefs.

Like Confucius, Han Yü was not a social revolutionary. He did not criticize the social system of his time and quite probably enjoyed his elite status. However, he agreed with Confucius that mastery of ethical principles was more important than hereditary status, and that such mastery should be the basis for the selection of officials. He also acknowledged that merchants played a legitimate role in society, and that there were activities for which the state and its officials were not suited.

Contrary to the praises that were lavished on him by some of his most ardent admirers in later times, Han Yü did not single-handedly change the direction of Chinese thought. He merely contributed to an ongoing movement which had its culmination in the Sung period.

His contribution was significant, however, because it shows that the roots of Sung Neo-Confucianism do go back to the T'ang; because it helped to shift the focus of Chinese thought back to the importance of life in this world (this, too, was an ongoing process); and because it reaffirmed the relevance of Confucianism to Chinese life at a time when such reaffirmation was needed.

GLOSSARY

- An Lu-shan 安祿山  
 Ch'an 禪  
 Chang Chi 張籍  
 Chang Chien-feng 張建封  
 Chang Chiu-ling 張九齡  
 Chang Hung-ching 張弘靖  
 Chang P'ing-shu 張平叔  
 Chang Shu 張署  
 Ch'ang-li 昌黎  
 Chao (bright) 昭  
 Chao (to encourage) 釗  
 Chao Ching 趙憬  
 Chao K'uang 周況  
 Chao Te 趙德  
 Chao Wen-tzu 趙文子  
 Ch'ao-chou 潮州  
 Ch'e 徹  
 Chen 真  
 Chen-chou 鎮州  
 Chen-yüan 貞元  
 Ch'en Yin-k'o 陳寅恪

- Cheng 鄭  
 Cheng-ch'en lun 爭臣論  
 Cheng Hsüan 鄭玄  
 Cheng Yin 鄭綢  
 Cheng Yü-ch'ing 鄭餘慶  
 Ch'eng-kuan 澄觀  
 Ch'i 氣  
 Ch'i Ch'i 騏驎  
 Ch'i-chü she-jen 起居舍人  
 Chia Tan 賈耽  
 Chia Tao 賈島  
 Chiang-t'ao 絳桃  
 Chiao-hua 教化  
 Chiao-jan 皎然  
 Chieh 介  
 Chieh 桀  
 Chieh-tu-shih 節度使  
 Chien-ai 兼愛  
 Chien-ch'a yü-shih 監察御史  
 Ch'ien 前  
 Ch'ien Chung-lien 錢仲聯  
 Ch'ien Mu 錢穆  
 Ch'ien Ta-hsin 錢大昕  
 Chih 雉  
 Chih (pheasant) 雉

- Chih (to govern) 治
- Chih chih-kao 知制誥
- Chih-fang yüan-wai-lang 職方員外郎
- Chih t'ien-hsia 治天下
- Chin-shih 進士
- Chin-su 晉肅
- Ch'in Chi 秦濟
- Ching-an 靖安
- Ching-chao yin 京兆尹
- Ching-lueh shih 經略使
- Ching-tsung 敬宗
- Ching-t'u 淨土
- Ch'ing 情
- Ch'ing-yen 清言
- Ch'ing-yi lu 清異錄
- Chiu T'ang Shu 舊唐書
- Chiu wen 舊文
- Ch'iu 蒞
- Chou 紂
- Chou Chün-ch'ao 周君巢
- Chou K'uang 周況
- Chu Hsi 朱熹
- Chü-ch'e 車轍
- Chü Wen-chen 俱文珍
- Ch'ü Yüan 屈原

Chün-t'ien 均田

Chün-tzu 君子

Ch'ün-shu chih-yao 群書治要

Chuan Hsü 韻頊

Chuan-yün shih 轉運使

Ch'uan-ch'i 傳奇

Ch'üan 權

Ch'üan Te-yü 權德輿

Chung-shu she-jen 中書舍人

Chung-shu shih-lang 中書侍郎

Chung-shuo 中說

Fa 法

Fa-chao 法照

Fa-ts'ao ts'an-chün 法曹參軍

Feng-hsiang 鳳翔

Feng Su 馮宿

Fu 賦

Fu-hsing shu 復性書

Fu-ping 府兵

Fu shu chiao tao 扶樹教道

Han Chung-ch'ing 韓仲卿

Han Huang 韓滉

Han Hui 韓會

Han Hui chuan 韓會傳

Han Hung 韓弘

- Han-lin 翰林  
 Han T'ing-i 韓廷一  
 Han Yen 韓弇  
 Han Yü 韓愈  
 Han Yü yen-chiu 韓愈研究  
 Han Yün-ch'ing 韓雲卿  
 Ho-yang 河陽  
 Hou Ching 侯景  
 Hsi (white) 皙  
 Hsi (formerly) 昔  
 Hsiang 湘  
 Hsiang-liu  
 Hsiao jen 小人  
 Hsiao Kung-ch'uan 蕭公權  
 Hsiao Ts'un 蕭存  
 Hsiao Ying-shih 蕭穎士  
 hsien 縣  
 Hsien-ling 縣令  
 Hsien-tsung 憲宗  
 Hsin T'ang Shu 新唐書  
 Hsing 性  
 Hsing-chün ssu-ma 行軍司馬  
 Hsing Chün-ya 刑君牙  
 Hsing-chuang 行狀  
 Hsing-pu shih-lang 刑部侍郎



- Hsiu-ts'ai 秀才  
 Hsüan-ch'eng 宣城  
 Hsüan-hsüeh 文學  
 Hsüan-tsung 玄宗  
 Hsüan-wei shih 宣慰使  
 Hsüan-wu 宣武  
 Hsüeh-sheng tai chai-lang 學生代齋郎  
 Hsün-tzu 荀子  
 Hsün Yüeh 荀悅  
 Hua-yen 華嚴  
 Huai-nan-tzu 淮南子  
 Huang-fu Po 皇甫鏞  
 Huang-fu Shih 皇甫湜  
 Huang-Lao 黃老  
 Hun Chen 渾瑊  
 Huo-ling k'u 火靈庫  
 Jen 仁  
 Jung 戎  
 K'ai-yüan 開元  
 K'ao-kung lang-chung 考功郎中  
 K'u 轡  
 K'ung Ying-ta 孔穎達  
 Kakehi Fumio 笈文生  
 Kan-ch'un 感春  
 Kao Ch'i 高啓

- Kao-tsu 高祖
- Ku-wen 古文
- Kuan Chung 管仲
- Kuan-ch'a shih 觀察史
- Kuan-ch'a t'ui-kuan 觀察推官
- Kung-te shih 功德使
- Kung-ts'ao ts'an-chün 功曹參軍
- Kuo-tzu chi-chiu 國子祭酒
- Kuo-tzu hsüeh 國子學
- Lai-nan lu 來南錄
- Lan-t'ien 藍田
- Lang-chung 郎中
- Lao-ch'eng 老成
- Lao-tzu 老子
- Li 禮
- Li Ao 李翱
- Li Cheng-chen 李程
- Li chi 禮記
- Li Chi-fu 李吉甫
- Li Feng-chi 李逢吉
- Li Ho 李賀
- Li-hsüeh 理學
- Li Hua 李華
- Li Hung 李弘
- Li Pi 李泌

- Li Po 李白  
 Li Po 李渤  
 Li Po-k'ang 李伯康  
 Li Shen 李紳  
 Li Shih 李實  
 Li Su 李愬  
 Li Sun 李巽  
 Liang-shui fa 兩稅法  
 Liang Su 梁肅  
 Lin Shu 林舒  
 Liu-chih 柳枝  
 Liu Hsiang 劉向  
 Liu Pi 柳泌  
 Liu-shou 留守  
 Liu Tsung-yüan 柳宗元  
 Liu Yen 劉晏  
 Liu Yü-hsi 劉禹錫  
 Lo Lien-t'ien 羅聯添  
 Lu Ch'ang-yüan 陸長源  
 Lu Ch'i 盧杞  
 Lu Chih 陸贄  
 Lu Ch'un 陸淳  
 Lu Mai 盧邁  
 Lu Ts'an 陸倕  
 Lu Yi 盧怡

Lu Yu 陸游

Lun fo-ku piao 論佛骨表

Lung-hu pang 龍虎榜

Ma Ch'i-ch'ang 馬其昶

Ma Sui 馬燧

Men-hsia shih-lang 門下侍郎

Men ti-tzu 門弟子

Meng Chiao 孟郊

Meng Chien 孟簡

Meng-hsien 孟縣

Meng K'o 孟軻

Ming-ching 明經

Mo-tzu 墨子

Mu-tsung 穆宗

Nü 孀

Nan-hsüeh 南學

Nan-yang 南陽

Nien-p'u 年譜

Niu Seng-ju 牛僧儒

Niu Yüan-yi 牛元翼

Ou-yang Hsiu 歐陽修

Pai-ch'uan 百川

P'an-chiao 判教

P'an-kuan 判官

Pei-hsüeh 北學

- P'ei Hsing-li 裴行立  
 P'ei Tu 裴度  
 P'ei Yen-ling 裴延齡  
 Pen-hsing 本性  
 Pen-ts'ao 本草  
 Pi-pu lang-chung 比部郎中  
 Pi-shu lang 祕書郎  
 P'i Hsi-jui 皮錫瑞  
 P'i-p'a 琵琶  
 Pieh-yeh 別業  
 P'ien-t'i wen 駢體文  
 Ping-pu shih-lang 兵部侍郎  
 Po 博  
 Po-ai 博愛  
 Po Ch'i 柏耆  
 Po Chü-yi 白居易  
 Po-hsüeh hung-tz'u 博學宏辭  
 Po-lo 伯樂  
 Po-shih 博士  
 P'o-yang 鄱陽  
 Shao-chou 韶州  
 Shao Hao 少昊  
 Shen-chou 韶州  
 Shen-ts'e 神策  
 Shih 士

Shih Ch'ao-i 史朝義

Shih-lu 實錄

Shih pi-shu-sheng chiao-shu 試秘書省校書

Shih-shuo 師說

Shih-yen 釋言

Shu-chi 書記

Shun 舜

Shun-tsung shih-lu 順宗實錄

Ssu-ma Ch'ien 司馬遷

Ssu-ma Hsiang-ju 司馬相如

Su Shih 蘇軾

Su-tsung 肅宗

Sui 歲

Sung-ch'ung wen 送窮文

Sung feng-po 訟風伯

Sung Hui-shih 送惠師

T'ai-hsüeh 太學

T'ai Mou 太戊

T'ai-p'ing 太平

T'ai-shih 太師

T'ai-tsung 太宗

T'ai-tzu yu shu-tzu 太子右庶子

T'ang 湯

T'ang chih-yen 唐摭言

T'ang liu-tien 唐六典

T'ang kuo shih pu 唐國史補

T'ang Yü-lin 唐語林

T'ao Ch'ien 陶潛

T'ao Ku 陶穀

T'ien Heng 田橫

T'ien Hung-cheng 田弘正

T'ien-t'ai 天臺

T'ung 通

T'ung-tien 通典

Ta-tien 大顛

Tai-tsung 代宗

Tan Chu 啖助

Tao 道

Tao-chiao 道教

Tao-hsüeh 道學

Tao-t'ung 道通

Te 德

Te-tsung 德宗

Ti 狄

Ti-wu Ch'i 第五琦

Ts'eng-feng 層峯

Ts'ui Ch'ün 崔群

Ts'ui Yu-fu 崔佑甫

Tsai-hsiang 宰相

Tseng Shen 曾參

Tu Hsün 讀荀

Tu-ku Chi 獨孤及

Tu Mo 讀墨

Tu Tu 杜度

Tu Yu 杜佑

Tu-kuan yüan-wai-lang fen-ssu 都官員外郎分司  
tung-tu ping p'an tz'u-pu 洛陽並判祠部

Tung Chung-shu 董仲舒

Tz'u-pu 相部

Tz'u-shih 刺史

Tzu-chih t'ung-chien 資治通鑑

Tzu-ssu 子思

Wang Ch'ung 王充

Wang Mang 王莽

Wang Ming-sheng 王鳴盛

Wang Shih-tao 李師道

Wang Shu-wen 王叔文

Wang T'ing-tsou 王庭湊

Wang T'ung 王通

Wang Ya 王涯

Wei 尉

Wei Cheng 魏徵

Wei Ch'u-hou 韋處厚

Wen 文

Wen-chung-tzu 文中子



- Wen-heng 文衡
- Wen-hsin tiao-lung 文心雕龍
- Wu 武
- Wu-ch'ang 武昌
- Wu-ching cheng-i 五經正義
- Wu-pen 無本
- Wu Ting 武丁
- Wu Yüan-heng 武元衡
- Ya t'ui-kuan 衙推官
- Yang 陽
- Yang Ch'eng 陽城
- Yang Chu 揚朱
- Yang Hsiung 楊雄
- Yang-shan 陽山
- Yang Yen 楊炎
- Yao 堯
- Yeh-chi 野雞
- Yen Shih-ku 顏師古
- Yi (discuss) 議
- Yi (righteousness) 義
- Yi Yin 伊尹
- Yi-ch'eng 宜城
- Yi-li 儀禮
- Yin 陰
- Yin 陰

Yu-p'u-yeh 右僕射

Yü 禹

Yü-pu 虞部

Yü-shih chung-ch'eng 御史中丞

Yü-shih ta-fu 御史大夫

Yü Ti 于頔

Yüan 原

Yüan Chen 元稹

Yüan Chieh 元結

Yüan-ching 元經

Yüan-chou 袁州

Yüan-ho 元和

Yüan hsing 原性

Yüan hui 原毀

Yüan jen 原人

Yüan kwei 原鬼

Yüan tao 原道

Yüan Tsai 元載

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